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SIX BOYS



by
Elizabeth W. Champney

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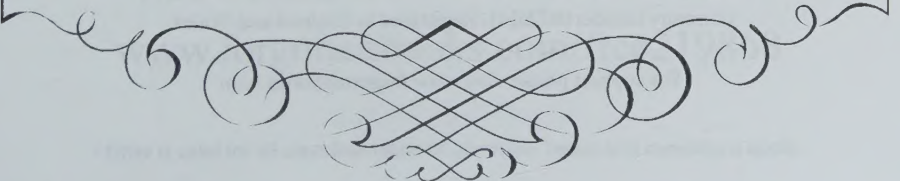
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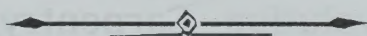
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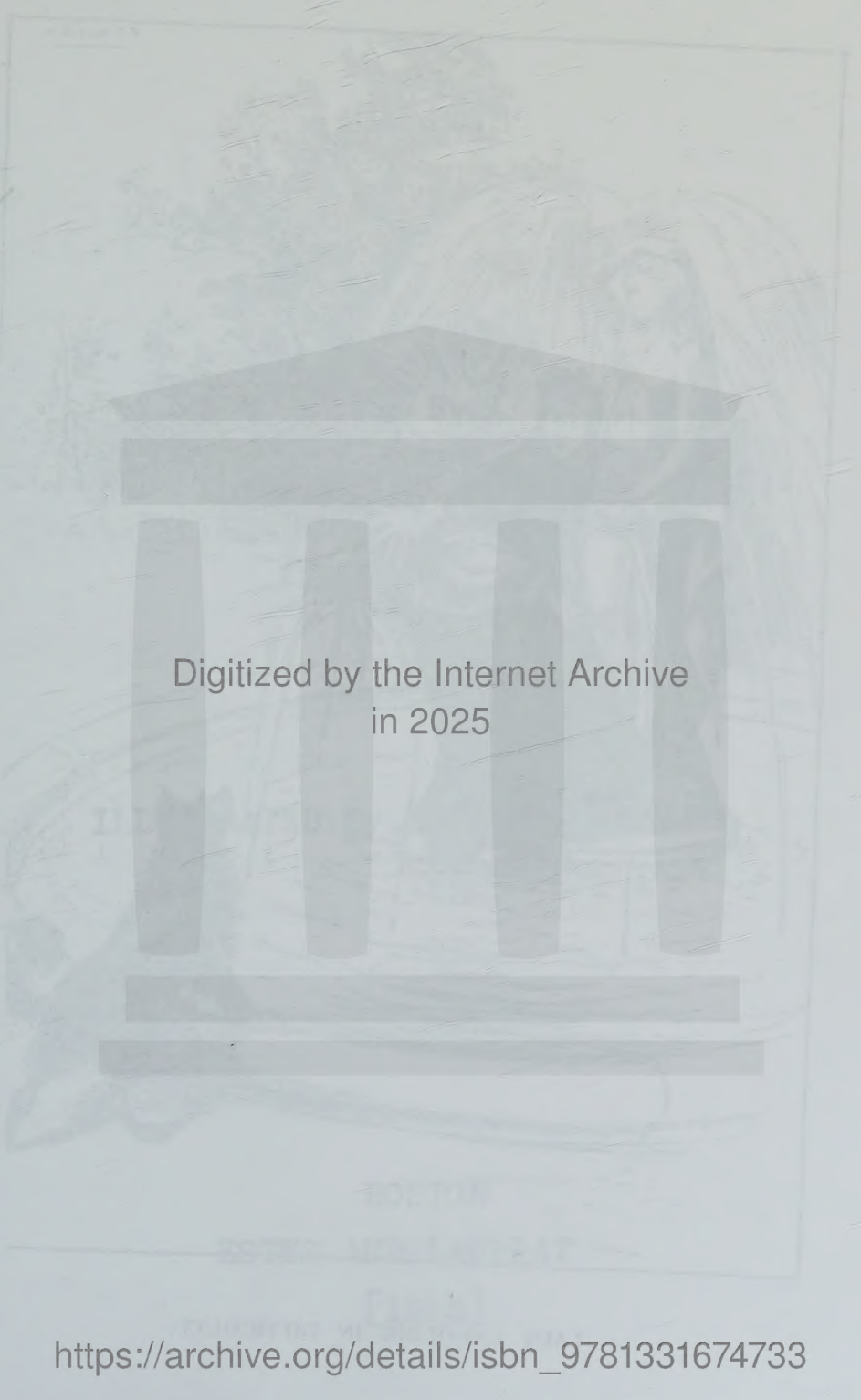
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LADY CAROLINE IN DIFFICULTY.

SIX BOYS

CONTENTS

By

ELIZABETH W. CHAMPNEY
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ILLUSTRATED By FRANK T. MERRILL

BOSTON

ESTES AND LAURIAT

[1893]

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CHAPTER I.

THE CLAN.

“WELL, I never! What will them impusses be up to next?”

It was Miss Letitia, the village storekeeper, who spoke, peering from between the gingerbread men who were poised on the sashes of her little shop-window. The “imps” or “impusses,” as Miss Letitia called them, were five of the six boys who were nearly always together, and whose performances were the amusement and occasionally the dismay of the village.

The “Six Boys” they were always called, though one of the number was a girl; and every one knew just who were meant, though there were many other boys in Little Wisdom. They were, —

PERCY COFFIN,	
“BRICKTOP” HEYWOOD,	
“RIGGERS” DA SILVA,	
“HUNX”	} HUNTINGTON.
“TRIX”	
LITTLE JACK	

This was the roll-call of the clan. All were between the ages of twelve and sixteen. The oldest, and the acknowledged chief, was Percy Coffin, the minister's mischievous son; next ranked good-natured Ned Heywood, a farmer's boy (called familiarly "Bricktop" from his bright red hair); then came the Brazilian, and last the three Huntingtons.

The democratic character of the clan will be recognized when we explain that Bricktop was second in popularity, though his family were considered decidedly "common;" while the three Huntingtons were invariably mentioned last, though their father was a city millionaire, and their home the only Queen Anne villa in the town.

Miss Letitia's shop was directly opposite the minister's house; and on the day on which our story opens the troop (with the exception of Trix Huntington) were visiting Percy and Riggers, who boarded at the parsonage.

As Dr. Coffin was writing his sermon, Mrs. Coffin had asked the boys to amuse themselves out of doors. Percy, always fertile in expedients, suggested that they were chipmunks or monkeys, and lived in trees.

"Miss Letitia cannot reproach at me if I so do," said Riggers. "She have often called me a monk. If I am so, I must have the habit of zose beast, ze which I have often seen to jump and to chatter in ze tree of my fazer's plantation on ze Amazons."

Rigger's true name was Rodrigues Joaquim Nepo-

mucene Maria da Silva; but this was too much for the other boys.

At first they murdered his leading Christian name by calling him "Rod-riggers;" but even that soon degenerated into simply "Riggers." He was little and wizened and yellow, but he was gentle and polite, and his five friends liked him; and when the unmannerly factory-boys over at Toughend shouted derisively, —

" Riggers, Riggers,
Lives among the niggers,"

Hunks — as Humphrey Huntington, the heavy-weight of the coterie, was nicknamed — seized the offending rhymester and administered condign punishment.

The tree which had been selected for their base of operations this afternoon was Y-shaped. Riggers and Percy had climbed into its main branches, Riggers carrying Mrs. Coffin's clothes-line coiled about his waist. He now proceeded to unwind it, and letting down one end, the other boys attached various articles, which were drawn into the tree. The first article to be hoisted was a long plank, which was supported by the two branches, and formed a sort of bridge or platform, on which the two boys danced, sat, and gambolled. Other articles were drawn up and placed on the platform by means of a basket fastened to the end of the rope. Riggers suggested that monkeys lived upon nuts, and that as the tree was an elm he could not discover any. Hunks took

the hint, and running over to Miss Letitia's, bought a paper bag of chestnuts, which was immediately elevated to the monkeys. Percy complained that the chestnuts were not roasted, and it was determined to build a fire on the platform and roast them. This was accomplished just as Miss Letitia looked from between her gingerbread men and women. The "impusses" had drawn up an old tomato can, in which the chestnuts were placed, and the basket had been filled with kindling-wood, which was piled around the can. Riggers had matches in his pocket, the paper bag ignited the kindling-wood, and a miniature bonfire was soon blazing around the chestnuts. But the fire was too near to be comfortable, and Riggers and Percy each mounted a different limb of the tree. The fire crackled and leaped still uncomfortably near Percy's legs. He essayed to mount higher; but the branch was too slender, and bent beneath his weight. The fire was snapping at his trousers; in another moment they would be ablaze.

"Fire, fire!" screamed Miss Letitia, pounding on her window frantically, and creating great havoc among her gingerbread men. "Mercy on us, they'll be burned alive!" But the boys were equal to the emergency. Bricktop had darted to the back porch, seized a milk-pail, filled it at the well, and fastened it to the end of the rope which still dangled from Rigger's waist. Riggers pulled up the water, extinguished the fire, and presently the boys descended quite unhurt. "The little rascals!" gasped

Miss Letitia; "I wish they had been scotched just a mite, to teach 'em not to frighten folks out of their seven senses."

Riggers came into the store a little later to buy some shoemaker's wax to make a jumping frog from a wish-bone; and Miss Letitia said to him spitefully, "'Pears to me you're a regular little imp o' darkness."

The boy showed all his white teeth as he replied, "Pardon, signora, are you not what zey call a leetle *impolite*?"

The pun was widely circulated; and when Mrs. Coffin heard it, she declared that the boy was really making progress in acquiring the language, if he could play with it sufficiently to make a pun. The little foreigner, so far away from his own mother, had won his way into Mrs. Coffin's motherly heart. He had been most persistently silent for nearly a month after his arrival, partly because he was ashamed of his broken English, and partly from homesickness. The rest thought him morose; but Mrs. Coffin saw through the mask of reserve. She had heard the boy sobbing at night as though his heart would break, and she had slipped into his room in the darkness and had kissed him, without a word. The boy had made no reply; but he was comforted, and from that time responded eagerly to Percy's overtures of friendship.

Handsome Percy Coffin was the acknowledged leader of the clan; but not because he was the

minister's son, and his father one of the old style Doctors of Divinity who "*ruled* his congregation" from his ordination to his decease. The Rev. Solomon Coffin was descended from a long line of ministers of whom it was written: "They were all endowed with unnatural abilities; their presence and conversation did peculiarly command awe. They were painful preachers of the gospel, and descended from one of the best families that ever came out to this colony.

" Their works of piety and love
Remain before the Lord;
Honor on earth, and joys above
Shall be their sure reward."

Percy would never have gained his leadership on account of the position of his family, for social distinctions were not regarded by the boys of Little Wisdom. He owed it simply to the fact that he was the best fellow in the village, overflowing with good fellowship to all around him, and that he was not in the least "backward about coming forward." It was a family trait of the Coffins that they loved popularity and in different ways they gained it.

Old Eben Sawyer said that "you might shake the Coffins up with all creation, and at the end of the shaking they would be found on the top of the heap." Solomon Coffin was secretly as much pleased by the recognition which his own piety and learning had always obtained, as his son Percy by his election as

captain of the school foot-ball team. The Coffin family pride was centred and concentrated in the minister's maiden sister, widely known as *Lady* Caroline Coffin. If her brother ruled his congregation, she ruled him and his gentle wife; but she could not rule Percy. Strange to say, with all his faults,— for Miss Letitia voiced the general opinion when she said that Percy Coffin abundantly carried out the proverb in regard to the mischief to be found in ministers' sons,— Percy was the idol of her heart. She regretted that her brother had given him his mother's family name instead of weighting him with the ancestral Solomon, which had been borne by five Coffins in succession, and to her mind hardly adequately represented the magnificence and wisdom of the Coffins, who certainly surpassed "great David's greater son."

It was also a grief to Lady Caroline that her brother had received into his family to tutor for college the Brazilian boy, whom she persisted in regarding as the instigator of all Percy's mischief; whereas the facts were exactly opposed to this delusion, as the little foreigner was gentle and naturally well behaved, and whatever pranks he executed were suggested by Percy.

It was well for her own peace of mind that Lady Caroline had not been at home during the episode of the bonfire in the tree.

She was making a call upon Mrs. Huntington. Lady Caroline had wrestled long with her ideas of dignity before she had brought herself to this deter-

mination. The Huntingtons were "new people" in Little Wisdom, inasmuch as it was only five years since they had bought the "Pride estate" and erected their wonderful villa thereon. The old Pride mansion had been destroyed by fire many years before this, and the shrubbery had grown into trees, while the small statues, which had once gleamed white on the well-clipped lawns, were clothed with green mould and wrapped with tangling vines. Only the great central chimney stood solitary in the centre of a little depression, which had once been the cellar, a monument to the departed Prides.

The Huntingtons had been in the habit of spending their summers at the neighboring watering-place of Great Folly, where Mr. Huntington sent his horses, and amused himself by exploring the beautiful drives which covered the county as with a network. In one of these he had discovered the Pride estate. His imagination told him how easily it could be restored, and he recognized in this neglected piece of property a valuable investment. It appealed to Mrs. Huntington's imagination in another way. She was weary of the fashion and the publicity of Great Folly, and she was delighted when her husband proposed to buy the Pride property and build a summer home. She had enjoyed her first tour of inspection about the place.

"The terrace and the balustrade
Were broken, weedy, and decayed ;
The garden walks were overgrown ;
The flowers were low, the weeds were high ;

The fountain stream was choked and dry;
The dial stone with moss was green :
But still the rose of May was seen."

She loved the place because it seemed to bring to her a breath from the olden time. The shady walks were grateful to her; the seclusion delightful. She was so tired of noise and glare. She regretted that the old mansion itself was no longer in existence, with its pillared portico, its uneven floors, and legends of romance and gloom. She poked about among the ruins with her parasol, and was much interested in the great chimney which had defied the assaults of flame without and within like the donjon keep of a castle.

She asked her husband to incorporate it in the new home; and as it was found to be entirely uninjured, he was very willing to do so. Mrs. Huntington taught her children Longfellow's poem, "The Golden Milestone," and succeeded in winning their respect for the old chimney, and their pity for the family history which it represented, though all they knew of it was that it had been one of dire misfortune. In the rough plaster over the jamb she traced the lines, —

"We may build more splendid habitations,
Fill our rooms with paintings and with sculptures,
But we cannot
Buy with gold the old associations."

Lady Caroline had known the dead-and-gone Prides; and she resented the fact that another family should

build a flaunting villa on the site of their old mansion, and should be happy where they had been miserable. Lady Caroline insisted on believing that the Huntingtons were vulgar upstarts. It was a fiction in her mind that Mr. Huntington had made his money in the manufacture of guano. It would have been hard to explain why she should look down upon him on this account, had it been the fact, any more than upon the worthy farmers of Little Wisdom who made their money by spreading guano on their productive meadows.

Mrs. Huntington attended the Orthodox church; and it was all very well, Lady Caroline argued, for her brother's wife to call upon her. As the minister's wife it was her duty to do a great many disagreeable things. Lady Caroline only wished that this might be understood as an official call, and not as a social recognition. She had often asserted that she would never demean herself by such associations. But Mrs. Huntington, entirely unconscious of the light in which she was regarded, went on her gentle way, doing unobtrusive kindnesses, and winning Mrs. Coffin's affection. Mrs. Huntington called one day to take the minister's wife to drive, and finding her too busy to accept, offered to take Lady Caroline instead. In spite of herself the aristocratic old lady was flattered; and she accepted the attention, though she felt that it was a great condescension on her own part, and that possibly Mrs. Huntington wished thereby to announce to the parish the fact of their

acquaintanceship. This view of her motives was rather shaken by the route which Mrs. Huntington chose,—a lonely one, following up a picturesque gorge, and skirting a range of wind-swept hills commanding a grand view. She returned by an unfrequented road, and entering the village just as every one was at supper, deposited Miss Coffin at her brother's door, without having met one of his parishioners, or having attracted the attention of any one except the all-observant Miss Letitia.

To tell the truth, Lady Caroline was a little disappointed; for she had not ridden in a carriage since the funeral of the last family friend, and she would have been pleased to have the unaccustomed grandeur observed and commented upon.

Not only were Mrs. Huntington and Mrs. Coffin sympathetic, but Percy Coffin was on the best of terms with the three Huntington children,—Humphrey, Trix, and little Jack. Humphrey, it will be remembered, was the heavy boy who was nicknamed Hunx. Lady Caroline persisted that he was stupid as well as fat, and always spoke of him as “the lummux.” Trix, or Beatrix Huntington, she called “the tom-boy,”—with some show of reason; for Trix liked boys, boys' sports, and boys' companionship, and was always mentioned as one of the six boys. Little Jack was a large-eyed, imaginative boy of seven, who simply worshipped Percy Coffin; and it was he who had won Lady Caroline's heart so far that she had decided to call upon his mother. It happened in

this wise. Jack called one afternoon upon Percy, and, not finding him, stood for a moment greatly interested in an embroidered picture, executed in Lady Caroline's youth, representing Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

"Is that a picture of Percy?" he asked of Lady Caroline, who was watching him with her piercing black eyes.

"No, my dear," she replied; "that is Solomon."

"I might have known," Jack replied; "he is n't nearly as good-looking as Percy. Was he as smart?"

"I s'pose so," Lady Caroline admitted grudgingly. "He was the wisest man that ever lived."

"I bet you, Percy'll beat him when he is a man."

Lady Caroline hemmed; she sympathized with the sentiment, but deprecated the manner in which it was expressed. "So you like Percy?" she asked.

"Just don't I, though. Percy's just splendid. I think he's the elegantest boy that ever lived. Don't you?"

"Yes," replied Lady Caroline, quite truthfully; "I do. You seem to be a very nice boy yourself; would you like a cooky?"

"Yes, ma'am, if you please, ma'am." Lady Caroline hastened down cellar to search for something with which to regale her little friend. She plunged her mittened fingers into a tall stone jar only to find that it contained salt pork, and reaching for a pan on a high swing-shelf, which she imagined might contain gingersnaps, overturned a quantity of cream on her

black lace cap. She found some doughnuts at last, and hurrying upstairs found to her astonishment that her little guest was gone. Looking down the street, she saw him running after a load of hay which was crossing the meadow, and on which Jack's sharp eyes had discovered Percy's bright blazer. "Bless his heart!" said Lady Caroline; "he'd rather run after Percy than eat doughnuts. Well, that beats David and Jonathan."

Lady Caroline never did anything by halves. Convinced that little Jack Huntington was made of better stuff than she had imagined, and that his mother had not endeavored to parade her acquaintanceship with the Coffins, Lady Caroline determined to make the *amende honorable* by calling formally at the house.

She had not entered the grounds since the home of the Prides had been destroyed, and she half expected to see the old mansion, with its white pillars built in imitation of Mount Vernon, appear before her between the trees; and as this mirage of her memory melted, and the pinnacled and balconied structure thrust itself upon her vision, she felt anew her first throb of indignation and resentment against the aggressive interlopers who had forcibly taken away her own past, which had been very intimately connected with that of the Prides. She felt like turning away and shaking the dust from her feet; but she had put her hand to the plough and would not turn back, and she tripped nimbly up the broad flight of steps which led to the

veranda. The idea of shaking the dust from her shoes was still uppermost in her mind, which was somewhat perturbed by her memories, and she proceeded nervously but vigorously to wipe her feet on a black fur door-mat which lay on the upper step. What was her amazement when the door-mat uncoiled itself, showed a remarkably white set of teeth and fiery eyes, and began snapping viciously at her prunella gaiters. Lady Caroline retreated backward down the staircase with great alacrity, and found herself in the basin of the fountain. The dog dashed after her, but stopped on the margin of the pool, not being of the water-spaniel variety. Lady Caroline waded to the centre of the basin, and climbed on the pedestal of the marble nymph, clinging to her for support; while the dog made the circuit of the fountain, barking and snapping, but not daring to cross to the frightened little old lady, though he was encouraged to do so by a sound of clapping from within a hammock at the end of the piazza, and cries of "Scat! Sick! At her, Billy, good dog!"

Suddenly Beatrix Huntington — for it was she — sprang from the hammock, bounded off the piazza into a bed of hyacinths, and caught the dog by the collar. "Oh! excuse me, excuse me!" she cried, laughing so heartily that she could scarcely speak. "I beg your pardon, I did not recognize you. I thought you were a silver-polish woman who came this morning, and while she got Tibbens to try her stuff, made off with Jack's christening-mug, and an old silver porrin-

ger that mamma likes to serve bonbons in. Dear me, how funny you look out there! How can I get you across?"

"You might lend me an umbrella," Lady Caroline replied with dignity. "I did n't surmise I should get caught in a shower, and I came unprotected."

"But you are not going to stay there, you know. I'll set this chair in the basin, and you can step on it and then jump across. Down, Billy, down, I say! Wait a minute and I will chain the dog if you are afraid of him;" and she dragged her pet away, laughing all the time in a frenzy of merriment. Then she returned and helped Lady Caroline, very limp as to her bombazine gown, and very stiff as to her deportment, into the great hall and up to the Pride chimney, where a low fire was burning on the great forged-iron andirons. Lady Caroline had resisted at first, but Trix had insisted on settling her in a wicker armchair to dry. She had brought a towel, and had carefully wiped down the bombazine gown, had taken off the prunella gaiters, and set them to dry on the andirons. She had changed Lady Caroline's open-work white stockings for a pair of her own black silk ones, and she had finally brought her a cup of hot tea. Mrs. Huntington was not at home; but Trix had waited upon Lady Caroline so deftly and withal so unassumingly, that that lady became every moment more and more mollified. She sipped her tea with much enjoyment, though she had never before seen it served with lemon; and she was much interested

when Trix informed her that it was called Orange Pekoe, on her inquiry as to whether it was Gunpowder or old Hyson.

"There are orange-buds in it," Trix explained, "and they give it the pleasant perfume as well as the name."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Lady Caroline; "what will they adulterate with next? I've heard that they even make strawberry jam by stirring up a mess of tomato, sugar, glue, and grass seed. That's the finishing touch,—grass seed, to imitate the little gritty seeds that grow on real strawberries. I should think your pa would be willing to pay a little more, and get real tea, now that he knows that this kind is counterfeit."

"I think he gets it because mother likes it best," Trix replied, repressing the scornful retort which started to her lips.

"You don't say!" Lady Caroline exclaimed, and then her attention was attracted by the great rough fireplace. "You haven't finished off your mantelpiece yet, have you? If it's going to be white marble, there's a tombstone-cutter over at Great Folly who carves real nice. He made the mantelpiece for Squire Billings's best room. It was very handsome, and it cost as much as fifty dollars. Mrs. Billings wanted to have a gas-log, such as she tells me they have in the city; but as there were no gas-works nearer than Great Folly, she gave up the idee. Now I see your pa has gas made on the place, and he could have one of those gas-logs as easy as anything."

"Papa would think the gas-log more of a counterfeit than the mixed tea," Trix replied, "especially here in the country, where it is so easy to have the real thing. He was reading one of Aldrich's poems from a magazine last night, and he came across something about a wood-fire that pleased him very much. Here is the magazine now, with a paper-cutter between the leaves marking the lines; let me read them to you, —

' Silent was the room,
Save when along the still damp apple-wood
A little flame ran that chirped like a bird, —
Some wren's ghost haunting the familiar bough.'

Papa does n't look like a man who is fond of poetry, but he appreciated that. It is something like the idea in mamma's favorite 'Golden Milestone,' which she had us all learn by heart, —

' On the hearth the lighted logs are glowing,
And, like Ariel in the cloven pine-tree,
For its freedom
Groans and sighs the air imprisoned in them.' "

"Apple-tree wood is very poor for an open fire," Lady Caroline remarked practically. "It spits and splutters too much. Never reminds me of the singing of birds; but then a wren is n't much of a singer, either, only yawps a little like a half-grown chicken. Hemlock's wuss; it snaps like a string of fire-crackers. Pine is n't good to burn, either; makes too hot a flame, and too soon over. Tell your father to stick

to hickory. You seem very fond of poetry here; what are those lines upon the chimney?"

Trix read them to her. "You see, this is the original old chimney that was in the Pride Mansion," she explained. "It has been through fire and water, and mother thought the sentiment appropriate."

"You would n't want to buy with gold the Pride associations, if you knew them," Lady Caroline remarked gloomily. "There's more than that chimney has been through fire and flood on account of the Prides."

"Oh! do you know about the Prides?" Trix asked eagerly. "Are there any legends, tragedies, or romances connected with the family? We want to have a ghost-story party some time. Won't you come over and tell us all about them? I am sure there must have been a ghost in the family, some white lady gliding along the old pillared portico, or some mysterious chamber with blood-stains on the floor —"

Lady Caroline had turned very pale; but as she was extremely sallow, her paleness only turned her from dark orange to a Mongolian yellow, and Trix did not notice it, but rattled on: "We will have the lights all turned out, the fire low, and we will all sit on the floor around it, and it will be delightfully gooey. Do promise that you will come!"

"No," replied Lady Caroline, abruptly, "I want to forget everything connected with this place; my experience has not been an interesting one."

"You mean your experience with Billy, — please

excuse him. You know Dr. Watts says 'it is their nature to.'"

Trix had had many trials with Billy, but she loved him dearly. In the first place he was such a handsome dog: a black Spitz, with a pelt as glossy and fine, as curly and as beautiful a black as the costliest furs of a Russian princess. And Billy was intelligent as well as handsome. From his sharp, nervous nose, his trembling, sensitive ears, his affectionate eyes, to the tip of his plummy tail, he was the liveliest, the most intense piece of emotional and expressional mechanism ever fashioned. Billy was passionately affectionate, and would nearly leap out of his skin on the return of any member of the family after even a short absence, and would caper himself into utter exhaustion in vain attempts to pour forth all his ecstasy of love and joy. He was loving, intelligent, and a thing of beauty, but alas! he was not good. Billy was utterly lacking in self-control. He could not be trusted to guard the market-basket, and he could not refrain from fighting with other dogs. He would drop the choicest piece of meat to cavort down the road after a bull-dog, who would invariably give him a good drubbing.

A good missionary once told her experience with a converted Indian. On seeing him smoking she took him to task, and told him that cigarettes were inconsistent with his new professions.

"Miss Mather," said the Indian convert, "me love you some."

"I hope so," replied Miss Mather; "I have certainly labored for your good, and I am glad if you appreciate it."

"Me love you some," repeated the Indian, checking the statement off on one of his fingers, "but love Jesus *more* some."

"Quite right," said Miss Mather, approvingly.

"You some," reiterated the convert, "Jesus more some, me love smoke *heap* more some."

If Billy could have voiced his feelings, he would have said that he loved Trix some, a juicy beefsteak more some, but a good fight *heap* more some.

The Huntingtons would go out for a drive with Billy lying across their feet like a handsome lap-robe. He would peer from sleepily blinking eyes dreamily off at the landscape, apparently meditating on the good, the true, and the beautiful, and just about to sink into peaceful slumber, when a speck in a distant field would suddenly arouse his attention. Alas! it was a collie dog faithfully guarding some cattle; and Billy would shoot from the carriage like a black comet, dash across the field, and engage that inoffensive collie in deadly combat; and before the boys could reach the scene of conflict and drag the contestants apart by their tails, one or both of the dogs would be severely injured.

Trix told Lady Caroline of Billy's evil propensities, and amused her by relating a conversation which Mrs. Huntington had had with Billy's former master, a German green-grocer. In this chat Mrs. Hunting-

ton had reproached the man for not informing her of Billy's weakness. Trix imitated to the life the German's reply, in which he detailed the troubles which he had experienced with Billy, and which had finally induced him to part with the dog.

“ ‘ Fighting mit other togs ! ’ ” mimicked Trix, “ ‘ I tell you, Mrs. Huntington, dot Billy vas one scandal. I tink I get myself arrested one two tree time by de bolice already. All dose messenger-boy dey holler, “ Hi ! a tog-fight ! ” and dey stay all day long my shop in front, and never take dose telegram so long as dey can make some togs come my street down. So must I lock up Billy mit a chicken-coop. I tell you, Miss Huntington, one Sunday my Henry vas valking mit Billy mit a chain, — I tell you mit a chain ; and dere come a man mit a bull-tog vat vas loose, dree times so big as Billy ; and dot bull-tog go snuffing round Billy, and worry Billy, and Billy have great oxcidements, and my Henry say, “ Maybe you better call your tog off, ain't it ? ” And the man say, “ My tog's all right. If your tog's 'fraid of my tog, you can take your tog away. ”

“ ‘ Den my Henry say, “ Oh, so your tog is all right ? Den maybe we make dese tings mutuals ! ” And he unchain Billy, and Billy he chomp on dat tog's back, and bite his back, and dat bull-tog is tree four blocks off already, and dat man holler, “ Call off your tog ! call off your tog ! ” But my Henry say, “ My tog is all right. If you want your tog, maybe you better call him yourself. Ain't it ? ” ’ ”

Trix was really a very good mimic, and gave the German-English dialect in an amusing way. In spite of herself Lady Caroline was greatly entertained.

"When I come again, you must chain Billy," she said, rising; "but bless me, my dear, you have been such a successful little hostess that I have not even asked for your mamma, and my call was to have been upon her."

"Mother has gone to Great Folly," Trix replied, "and will be very sorry to have missed your call. If you must go, please wait until I have the pony-cart harnessed, and I will take you home. I dare say that Humphrey and Jack are at your house now, and I can bring them back."

But when the pony-cart bobbed gently up the gravelled drive which led to the parsonage, the boys had flown. Only the debris about the tree, the charred kindling-wood, the milk-pail, and the clothes-line told of their pranks; and, yes — there was Riggers, who had bethought him late in the day of this circumstantial evidence, and had hurried back from the woodchuck-trap which the others were baiting, to clear away the mess before it should attract the attention of the minister. Lady Caroline caught sight of him now, dragging into the woodhouse the heavy plank which had been the base of their operations in the tree. He would not have been discovered had he not spied the pony-cart and lingered for a glimpse of Trix. The young girl nodded and beckoned, and he

came forward, a smile illuminating his usually melancholy features.

"What under the canopy have you boys been up to now?" asked Lady Caroline, severely; and without waiting for a reply, she added, "Clean up this lawn directly."

"It is that I justly make my endeavor to do," Riggers replied cheerfully.

"Oh! it is you, then, who made all this mischief," Lady Caroline sniffed. "Building a bonfire in the front yard! Don't you know you might have burned the house down, and there's no fire-engine in Little Wisdom? When a house takes fire, it's bound to go, same as the Pride house did. That fire was discovered first in the library in the east wing; and if we'd had an organized fire-company, they might have fit it; but as't was, it slowly eat its way through the whole mansion right before the eyes of the whole village." As she spoke, the Huntington boys and Percy appeared from behind the barn, and seeing the group in front of the parsonage, hurried toward it.

"I never did see the beat of boys for wanting to play with fire," Lady Caroline continued; "there's nothing so risky, and nothing on earth they enjoy so much."

"Except putting a fire out," said Trix.

"That's so," Percy responded. "I'm thinking of getting up a hook-and-ladder company; I think it would be real fun."

"Well, that sounds half-way like sense," commented

his aunt, approvingly. "I'm glad, Percy, that you didn't have anything to do with this tomfoolery of building a bonfire in the front yard. I'm proud to feel that with all your youthful exuberance of feelings you don't indulge in the babyish pranks of some boys."

Riggers flushed under his dark skin, and was about to retort that it was Percy who had first suggested building the fire; but he felt that it would be mean to inform upon his friend, and he looked toward him silently, expecting to see him correct the misapprehension. But Percy was talking busily with Trix about the new scheme of organizing a fire-company, and did not appear to hear. In reality he heard perfectly; but his Aunt Caroline was so hard to please, so "pernickety," as he expressed it, that it did not seem to him worth while to correct a mistake which had elevated him for the moment to her good opinion. He did not on the instant reflect that Riggers was suffering unjustly in his place. This dawned upon him after the Huntingtons had gone, when Riggers' silence became quite noticeable. Percy had no desire to give pain to any one, and he apologized in his own fashion. "That was a bad joke on you, Riggers. What can I do to make up for Aunt Caroline's mistake?"

"You can tell her zat I not all alone to blame," the boy replied steadily.

"Oh! that's too much fag. Besides, she would n't like you any better for it. She would only disap-

prove of me, and I'm sure you would n't want me to get out of her good graces. After all, what do you care what that old cat thinks of you? You know you're all right, and so do I. With me it's different. Mother wants me to keep on her good side. She has a lot of tin, and she is going to pay my expenses through college, if I don't manage to get out with her; and I tell you it's ticklish work to please all her fancies. But if I don't, there's no college for me, for a country minister's salary is n't enough to keep a chicken. I've got to be sweet on Lady Caroline, Riggers, if you and I are ever going to room together at college, and you would n't like to go without me, now, would you, old fellow?"

The boy's anger had been but a flash in the pan. He could never hold out against Percy's cajolery, and he threw his arm around Percy's shoulder in the feminine way with which men of Gallic descent caress each other, and then continued his work of picking up the charred kindling-wood. Percy followed him around, talking about the fire-company. It would be such a magnificent scheme. They must have black helmets and red flannel shirts, and a trumpet for the captain. Riggers suggested fire-buckets and a ladder, but Percy thought they were a minor consideration. The main necessity, he insisted, was the uniform. He thought his mother might be induced to make their shirts, but the helmets would have to be purchased in Great Folly. Hunx had more pocket-money than any of the rest of them; perhaps he would donate

the helmets. Riggers might suggest it to him at their next meeting.

"I think he'll do it," Percy said, "especially if you set him the example by subscribing the trumpet. Then what fun we will have training! They have a garden hose over at the Huntingtons'. If they will let us squirt that, we can run with it around town by dragging it on Bricktop's go-cart."

"But we cannot make ze water swish, swish, if we get away from ze tank on ze top of Mr. Huntington his house."

"Sure enough, — that may necessitate buying hose long enough to reach from one end of the village to the other."

"But will Mr. Huntington permit his water to be use for everybodies?"

"Awful mean if he don't. That's the least he can do when we are going to all this trouble for the public good. We must get together and elect a captain. Dear me, why did n't I think of it before the Huntingtons went home?"

"Bricktop, he make one good captain," said Riggers; "he run so fast."

"Hum, I don't know," Percy replied musingly. "Well, the vote will determine. Whoever the rest want. I don't care; I won't vote at all."

"If Hunx he pay zoze bill, zen p'r'aps he sink he ought be captain."

"No, indeed," Percy broke forth in fine scorn; "we are n't going to have any *buying* of offices, that

would be too disgraceful. We're above that sort of thing."

"I sink it would be nice, it would be gallant, if we had a lady captain, — Mees Treex."

"Oh! that's absurd. A *girl* captain of a fire-company! Whoever heard of such a thing? And Jack is too little to be thought of."

"And zen zare is only left you —"

"That's so. Well, we won't take anything for granted, but I do seem to be the only one really fit for the position."

"And me; zare is also myself."

"Sure enough, I forgot all about you, Riggers. Well, I said before the vote will decide, only no fellow must vote for himself; and to prove that I don't do that, I sha'n't vote at all."

"Zen you get it. I don't know why, but you always get it effery time."

"I don't know why, either, Riggers. It ain't my fault if the boys like me. I can't help being popular. You ain't jealous of me, are you? Because if you are, I'll resign and make them have you for captain."

For a moment a vision of himself shouting through the mighty trumpet and ordering the clan about, flashed through Riggers' mind. To stand upon the ridgepole of the barn, and yell to Percy to direct the hose on a certain window, to command Jack to climb the rose-trellis to the top of the veranda, shout to Bricktop to run like mad for more help, to Hunx

to break open the pantry door! What a mad delirium of joy that would be! It is doubtful whether any political preferment or literary fame of after years could give Riggers the same sense of triumph. Percy saw his eye kindle and his chest heave, and he added: "It's a pity, Riggers, that you aren't tall. The leader of a brigade is always tall, you know. Whoever heard of a short commander? He wouldn't look dignified; nobody could look up to him."

The name of Napoleon trembled on Riggers' lips, but he was silent. It was evident to him now that Percy wanted the position himself, and Percy would get it. He choked back his own ambition. After all, who was so handsome or such a good fellow as Percy? It was his natural right to reign,—it was absurd to think of any one else.

CHAPTER II.

THE PORTRAIT PARTY.

PERCY had shown his worst side in his conversation with Riggers. Percy had many splendid qualities which fitted him for the leadership which his friends were so ready to accord; but his love of popularity was so great that he stood in danger of paying too high a price for it. He felt that he had strained the friendly relations between Riggers and himself, and he made a special effort after this to propitiate the boy. He even proposed Riggers' name for captain of the Fire Brigade at the preliminary meeting. Riggers' face lighted with pleasure; but he sprang to his feet and declined the nomination, proposing Percy instead, who was unanimously elected.

It seems unkind to suggest that Percy had some idea that things would take this course. He honestly wished to please Riggers, and made a neat little speech in proposing him, which was warmly applauded. He even nominated Trix, after his own name had been proposed by Riggers, and won that little lady's regard by this futile bit of gallantry.

The idea of the helmets was given up; there were too many difficulties in the way. Hunx did not leap to

the suggestion that he might pay for them, and it was ascertained that only men's sizes could be obtained.

The mothers were won over to consent to red flannel shirts; but Mr. Huntington did not approve of a mile-long hose to be connected with his tank; he was willing however to lend his ladder in case of emergency.

Trix proposed that they should give an entertainment for the purchase of fire-buckets. Mrs. Heywood had offered to lend them her milk-pails, but Percy had felt that these would make no show at all in a parade. Each fireman, he argued, must keep his individual bucket ready for instant seizure in the front hall. It would never do to waste time by filing down to Mrs. Heywood's dairy when the alarm came. They decided upon wooden buckets painted red, and lettered

FIRE COMPANY

A,

as though Little Wisdom boasted a sufficient number of fire companies to extend a goodly distance down the alphabet.

Trix's scheme for raising money was a Portrait Party, to be given in their barn. It was to be an original adaptation of the tableau idea. The hay-mow, which was nearly empty, served as stage. An empty picture-frame, behind which a film of black tarletan had been stretched, was suspended in the centre of this stage, and the space around it screened off from view by carriage blankets. All the children

of Little Wisdom, and older people as well, were invited by a notice posted at the Post-Office, "Admission ten cents;" and every one was asked to bring some fanciful head-gear which would enable her or him to pose as a portrait. The fancy costuming was to be confined to the head, and to consist only of a clever use of veils, bonnets, hats, and wigs, so that very little trouble was entailed on any one. Even Mrs. Courtney, a talented artist who was spending the summer at Little Wisdom, and who had been asked to serve as stage-manager, found her duties far from onerous. They simply consisted in posing the actors, and in arranging the lights and backgrounds. A large screen had been placed behind the picture-frame at a sufficient distance to allow a person to stand between the two; and over this screen Mrs. Courtney threw—or, as Trix said, "flopped"—the different shawls, curtains, and bits of drapery which had been placed at her disposal, selecting as far as possible tints calculated to enhance the different costumes. There was a beautiful "Italian Girl" in contadina head-dress against a gold-colored brocade; and an "Egyptian Dancing-Girl," all sequins and bangles and floating scarf of striped gauze, leaned against a rich brown plush carriage-robe.

As a general thing, the costuming was very simple. A Madonna was arranged by letting down the hair of a sweet-faced girl, draping her in the parlor table-cloth, and giving her a stalk of lilies to hold. Humphrey wore his father's militia coat and helmet; and

Amy Heywood, with her blond hair braided under a little cap, made by basting together two handkerchiefs, presented him with a spray of forget-me-nots. This very touching tableau was entitled "The German Soldier's Farewell;" and while it was being shown, Mrs. Huntington sang very softly, "Wie wärest möglich dann das ich dich lassen kann." "After the War" showed the same young girl, dressed as a nun, holding a wreath of laurel; the inference being that her lover had fallen in battle. The nun's costume was concocted from two towels, forming the white bands framing the face, and a black shawl. Here, again, the effect was heightened by singing, — this time a plaintive Ave Maria.

Percy had a very effective pose in "The Rescue." He was supposed to represent a fireman. He wore a bright red flannel shirt and the same helmet which Humphrey had worn, minus the gilt eagle and plus a black oil-cloth havelock. A ladder had been found in the barn, and he stood upon one of its rounds holding in his arms a neighbor's curly-headed baby girl in her cunning white night-gown. A red Bengal light was burned in a pan at one side, and the smoke fanned in drifts across the tableau. This was the most elaborate tableau of the series.

Little Jack Huntington was delighted with it, and clapped his hands full of blisters.

"It was splendid," he said to Percy, after all was over. "Would you rescue me that way if our house should take fire?"

"Of course I would; and I would put out the fire too. I only hope that after all is done, there will be a fire to show what we can do. Not any valuable property destroyed, but only endangered, — somebody's hog-sty burned, and their house saved. Would n't it be fine if the Selectmen should call us out, and thank us publicly for our heroic efforts, and the Ladies' Sewing Society present us with a banner? How would you like that, little Jack, eh?"

"It would be just dindy! and you would receive the banner with a speech, would n't you, Percy? Oh! there must be a fire, it would be too mean not to."

"Hush!" cried Riggers. "Trix is to make ze portrait now. Let's all kite around in front of ze scene, and regard ze picture."

The tableau was called "The Marquise," and was the gem of the evening. Trix had her hair arranged *à la* Pompadour over a pincushion, and powdered with a teacupful of flour. A black lace mantle was thrown over her shoulders, and around her throat was clasped a diamond necklace. At least the stones looked like real diamonds, and shone and sparkled with such remarkable radiance that even an expert would have been deceived; and Mrs. Huntington, who knew that they were only paste, was almost startled.

This necklace had a wonderful effect upon Riggers. He uttered an exclamation in Portuguese, "My mother! the necklace of my mother!"

Only Mrs. Huntington, who sat near, understood him. She started and grew thoughtful, and presently

asked her son, "What is the real name of your Brazilian friend?"

"I don't know," Hunx replied; "it's a long bizziness; too much fag to remember it. I say, Riggers, will you tell mother your whole name?"

Riggers suspected that he was asked merely to be made sport of, and shook his head shyly.

"Will you tell me your father's name, then?" Mrs. Huntington asked kindly.

"My fazzer? But certainly. He is ze Baron Ildefonso Ignacio Mendoça da Silva of Santa Clara de los Amazonas."

Mrs. Huntington turned pale. "This is very strange," she murmured.

"Did you know my fazzer?" Riggers asked eagerly, "and will you tell me whezzer zat is my muzzer's necklace?"

Mrs. Huntington had recovered her composure. "I never knew your father," she replied, "though I have seen him in New York. The necklace which Trix is wearing cannot be your mother's. The diamonds are not genuine; it is a worthless bit of paste."

Riggers did not look quite satisfied, and he edged away and presently stole behind the scenes to ask Trix to let him look at the necklace.

"It is very strange," Mrs. Huntington repeated to Mr. Glitter, a friend of her husband who had driven over from Great Folly to see the tableaux, and had even suggested that Trix should take the part of a Marchioness, — "it is indeed very strange, but that

dark-haired little boy who was just speaking to me turns out to be the son of the Baron da Silva. He recognized the necklace."

"What is he doing in this vicinity?" asked Mr. Glitter.

"He is fitting for college with my brother, and boarding in our family," replied Lady Caroline, who had heard these remarks.

"It is to be hoped that your influence over him will be so good that he will not resemble his father as he grows older," said Mr. Glitter.

"What is the matter with his father?" asked Lady Caroline.

Mrs. Huntington gave Mr. Glitter a warning look; and he replied indefinitely that Brazilian barons were a bad lot generally, and Lady Caroline's prejudice was strengthened.

Just then Trix joined them, looking very prettily, and still wearing the necklace. "Where is grandma?" she asked. "She made me promise that as soon as my tableau was over I would bring the necklace directly to her."

"She is sitting in the armchair on the other side of the barn," Mr. Glitter replied. "Shall I carry the necklace to her for you?"

"No, thank you," said Trix. "I promised that I would trust it in no other hands. She sees me now, and is signalling me frantically with her fan. I wonder what she would say if she knew that just before my tableau her precious necklace slipped

down into Buttercup's manger, and Jack had to shin down a post and rescue it from some malt."

"I wish I had been there," Mr. Glitter remarked emphatically. He escorted Trix to her grandmother's chair; but that worthy dame emphatically refused his offers of assistance, and herself transferred the necklace from Trix's neck to her own. A little later, when Mr. Glitter came to her with the information that a repetition of Trix's tableau had been called for, and that he had been sent for the necklace, she refused to intrust it to him, and herself tottered with it behind the scenes.

It almost seemed as if the childish old lady thought that Mr. Glitter had designs against her property, so jealously did she guard it; and when it was once more on her yellow old neck, she hobbled away to the house, refusing Mr. Glitter's escort, and safely guarded by Humphrey on one side and the dog Billy on the other.

"She is perfectly ridiculous about that necklace," Trix said to Mr. Glitter, who seemed much offended by her rudeness, and stood regarding her with very black looks. "She thinks it is of unheard-of value, and will not trust it out of her sight. It possesses an uncanny sort of fascination over her."

There was some one else over whom the necklace appeared to exercise a fascination. Riggers had been silent and preoccupied ever since his first exclamation. He could not believe Mrs. Huntington's assurance that the stones were paste. The necklace so

exactly resembled the very familiar one which his mother had so often worn at festas away in the south land by the beautiful Amazons. The sparkling toy brought to his mind the last time he had seen her wear her necklace. It was at a farewell reception given at their own home just before they had brought him to North America. He remembered the dancing and music, the fireworks on the lawn where all the servants on the plantation could see them, and how he stood holding his mother's hand on the margin of a little lake filled with *Victoria Regias*. The great luxurious flowers seemed to loll on their soft mat-like leaves, as though they too were enjoying the lights and the music. He remembered how his mother leaned over him to kiss him good-night, looking like a royal lily herself in her peerless beauty, and that the great diamond star pendant from the necklace grazed his cheek, and when he cried out, she snatched it off and would not wear it again that night, saying playfully that she was angry with it, because it had hurt her boy, who was more to her than any jewels. And then they had left the beautiful Amazons, that network of mighty rivers, with the broad wildernesses of feathery palms and tangling vines; and the long sea-voyage was like a dream, and then had come this separation. They had brought him to this strange New England village, where life was so different, and had left him here. Why he could not understand; but it was his father's wish that he should be educated in the North, as he

himself had been. "Some time," his mother had promised, "you shall know just why it is that your father is so anxious that you should be brought up in New England, and know its winter snows, its stern religion, and its kindly hearts; and meantime trust us that it is love which has planned this experience for you."

Riggers had waited on Trix to the house, but he had not immediately gone home. On reaching the veranda Trix had curled herself up in the hammock, and he had stood beside her gently swinging her and telling her what the necklace had suggested, of his plantation home and of his mother. The boy was usually silent on these subjects, and Trix listened with keen interest. He was eloquent now in spite of his broken English, and Trix was sorry when her father called to her that it was time all young people were in bed. Even after she bade him good-night and entered the house, Riggers did not go away. He lay down in the hammock which she had left. It seemed like home to lie in the open air at night in a hammock. There was no hammock at the parsonage, and Riggers resolved to enjoy this one for a few moments. He lay for an hour listening to the light splashing of the fountain, wishing that he had his guitar with him that he might play a Portuguese serenade under Trix's window — which was her window, he wondered. There was a light in a room in a wing of the building just visible from where he lay. He watched it idly; some one was moving about within, and occa-

sionally her shadow was silhouetted against the white shade.

Suddenly Riggers was aware that another person was watching the same window. A gentleman stood in the shadow of a cedar on the lawn, and was following with an intense gaze the disappearance and reappearance of the shadow.

Riggers' first thought was that his idea of a sere-nade was about to be carried out by some one else, and he chuckled to himself as he thought: "Zat fellow is going to be badly fooled. He sinks zat ees ze room of Mees Trix, but it ees not. It is ze room of her old granmuzzer. I know her shadow on ze curtain."

But the gentleman had no guitar, and his next movement after the light was extinguished was a suspicious one. He mounted the veranda steps softly, and began cautiously to try the windows. At that instant Billy, who had been sharing the hammock with Riggers, leaped from within it, barking loudly, every hair on his spine standing erect with anger. The stranger retreated precipitately, and disappeared in the shadows. Billy continued barking; and presently Mr. Huntington came out upon the veranda with a lamp. "Oh! it is you, is it?" he said, on seeing Riggers. "I thought you went home an hour ago. What are you waiting round for? Do you want anything?"

"I want nossing," Riggers replied, with some indignation at being addressed in this brusque manner.

"I sat me in ze hammock, and I forget myself, zat is all."

"So you went to sleep in the hammock? Well, it's time all respectable people were asleep. It is striking midnight now. Dr. and Mrs. Coffin surely would not approve of your keeping such hours."

"I go," Riggers replied, rising with alacrity; "but I ought to tell you zat it was *not* to me zat Billee did bark. Zare was a man by ze tree." But Mr. Huntington, a little cross at having been disturbed in his first nap, only replied, "Stuff and nonsense!" and withdrew into the house, locking the door after him.

Billy trotted along by Riggers' side until he left the grounds, snuffing the earth and growling uneasily, and at times making short excursions into the shrubbery; but neither of them saw anything of the man who had excited their suspicions, and when they reached the gate-lodge Billy turned and scampered back toward the house.

When Riggers reached the parsonage, he found the front door unlocked and a lamp burning in the hall. He bolted the door, and taking the lamp mounted to the chamber which he shared with Percy. He was surprised to find the room vacant. Percy had not yet come home. He undressed as quietly as possible, extinguished his light, and slipped into bed. But with all his precautions Lady Caroline, who occupied the adjoining chamber and who had lain awake wondering why the boys did not return, heard him and called, "Is that you, Percy?"

Riggers' first impulse was to do Percy a good turn; and he answered, "Yes, ma'am."

"You are late enough, but that little rascal of a Riggers has n't come home yet. Where is he?"

"Don't know," replied Riggers, imitating Percy's voice as well as he could, and enjoying the joke highly, as he thought how he would be scolded the next morning, and how the tables would be turned when Percy would tell them all that he was the one who had been out late. The boy did not even now realize that Percy never confessed a misdeed to save a friend.

An hour later Lady Caroline lighted her candle, and passed down the hall like a grotesque ghost. She glanced in at the open door; there was only one boy in the bed. Really this was getting unpardonable. She would tell her brother in the morning, and Riggers should be severely reprimanded if not punished.

She was just dropping into uneasy slumber when Percy returned, and finding the hall-door locked, threw a handful of pebbles against his window to waken Riggers. The boy, always a light sleeper, sprang up, groped his way downstairs, and admitted his friend. Lady Caroline heard them whispering and laughing together as they returned to their room. She struck a match and looked at her watch. It was two o'clock.

She could not hear the words of the conversation; but Percy had just said: "You have helped me out of

the worst scrape, old fellow, by answering as you did. I would n't have my folks know where I have been to-night for anything. Now, with you it can't make any difference. I'll tell you all about it some time, but just now mum's the word. Keep it up, and if father is rough on you, just remember that I sha'n't forget it of you."

Poor Riggers! he had still to learn that a lie, even when uttered from the most unselfish of motives, — to shield a friend, — always does make a difference.

CHAPTER III.

THE DIAMOND NECKLACE.

AT this point in our story it is due to the reader that the mystery in regard to the necklace should be explained.

Mr. Huntington was a New York banker.

One day, two years previous to this summer, a foreigner accompanied by his wife called at the bank. The gentleman introduced himself as the Baron Ildefonso Ignacio Mendoça da Silva, of Brazil, and he brought credentials from the bank's correspondents which could not be doubted. His credentials were not only written, but the Baron was personally known to old Mr. Pounderly, one of the directors of the bank, who had been in Brazil and had been entertained by the Baron on his estates, consisting of extensive cacao plantations up the Amazons.

The Baroness was a beautiful brunette, with a languid but very winsome manner. Every man in the bank, from the President to the messengers, felt a little perturbation of heart when she closed her white lace parasol, alighted from the barouche, and drifted into the directors' private office leaning upon her husband's arm.

The Baron announced that he had come to request a loan of a few thousand dollars; and the Baroness

had brought her diamond necklace, which she wished to leave as security. The lady opened a worn, leather-covered jewel-case, and displayed the necklace, the ancestral diamonds of the Da Silvas. They were so magnificent that for a moment attention was diverted from the lady's beauty and fixed upon the regal gems. Six great solitaire diamonds hung as pendants from a slender chain, and in the centre blazed a star set with smaller stones.

The Baron wished to borrow only ten thousand dollars, and he represented the necklace as worth twice that amount. Only a few of the directors of the bank were present, and they did not feel that they ought to advance the money on this security. Mr. Huntington, whose attention was fixed upon the Baroness, saw a look of real distress come into the beautiful face. Her lips quivered, and her eyes filled with tears. What if the bank could not do this as a bank? Certainly he was free to advance the money as a private individual. Mr. Pounderly confirmed him in the generous impulse. "You are perfectly safe," he said. "I know that the Baron, though he may be in temporary need of money, owns estates that extend for twenty miles on both sides of the Amazons. He is an immensely wealthy man."

What Mr. Pounderly did not know was the fact that these estates were mortgaged heavily, and were in fact owned by different parties, though the cacao business was carried on under the Baron's name.

No misgiving crossed Mr. Huntington's mind; but he was a business man, and from mere force of habit he sent for an expert from Tiffany's to examine the diamonds.

The lapidary pronounced the stones genuine, and easily worth twenty-five thousand dollars. Mr. Huntington did not hesitate for a moment, but offered to draw his check for the entire amount. This the Baron would not accept; he needed only ten thousand, and he hoped to redeem the necklace before his return to Brazil.

The money given, Mr. Huntington locked the diamonds in the vault of the bank, and told the story that afternoon at the dinner-table. The entire family were greatly interested. "Why did n't you bring the necklace home with you and show it to us?" Trix asked. "I would like to wear it at Ruth Hallowell's wedding."

"Indeed you shall do nothing of the sort," said her grandmother. "Diamonds are quite unsuitable for a young girl who has not yet made her *début*. If any one is to wear them, I am sure that your father would prefer that I should do so."

Every one smiled, for Grandmother Huntington was a little, swarthy-complexioned old lady, with a shrivelled neck which would have been rendered doubly unattractive by such adornment. But Grandmother Huntington had all her life longed for diamonds, since a memorable occasion in early life when she had been presented to the Queen, and her head had

been turned by the blaze of jewels which she had witnessed. Her husband had indulged her fancy while he lived; and she had possessed many beautiful ornaments, but never a necklace. In her maturer years the weakness seemed to have been conquered, and she distributed her jewels among her daughters; but as she grew old and childish, her girlish mania returned, and would have seemed laughable had it not been so pitiable.

"You shall have the necklace, mother," Mr. Huntington said kindly, "if it is not redeemed; but none of you seem to realize that the gems still belong to the Baroness. They are simply in my safe-keeping until she pleases to claim them, and I would rather that none of you should wear them unless she forfeits them by not redeeming them within a year."

"She will not do it," Grandmother Huntington announced with a snap. "When people begin to pawn their valuables, they never redeem them. I shall have the diamonds, and I will leave them to Trix. When she is presented to the Queen, she shall not be mortified by seeing any duchess of the realm with finer jewels than hers."

The necklace took possession of Grandmother Huntington's mind. She insisted on her son's describing it over and over again, and she counted the days until it should come into her possession. Meanwhile the Baron and Baroness were well received in New York society. They bore themselves very well, were not ostentatiously extravagant or vulgarly push-

ing, and they won their way into the most select circles. Toward the close of the season a very grand ball was given, to which only the Four Hundred and a few very distinguished outsiders were bidden. Mr. and Mrs. Huntington were invited, and Grandmother Huntington urged that her daughter-in-law should wear the Brazilian necklace. Mr. Huntington had almost decided that his wife might wear the jewels on this occasion, when he received a call from the Baron. That gentleman stated that the Baroness and himself were invited to the ball, and he begged that she might be allowed as a great favor to wear her jewels on this occasion only. He did not ask to take them, but suggested that the bank messenger be sent with them to the door of the ladies' dressing-room, and receive them again at the same place as the Baroness left the ball-room. Mr. Huntington replied that as he and his wife would attend the ball they would bring the necklace with them, and that Mrs. Huntington would hand it to the Baroness in the dressing-room. It was so arranged. Mrs. Huntington herself clasped the necklace around the Baroness' beautiful throat, and followed her into the ball-room. A vague feeling possessed her that in lending the jewels her husband was doing a very hazardous thing, and her eyes did not leave the Baroness throughout the entire evening. Mrs. Huntington did not dance. She had come merely to watch the festivities, but she watched only the Baroness. She followed her from one part of the hall to another, whenever the Baroness

moved beyond her scrutiny. She fancied that the Baroness felt her espionage, for she not unfrequently caught her eye, and early in the course of the entertainment the beautiful Brazilian approached Mrs. Huntington, and assured her that she was quite weary, and was ready to leave. Mrs. Huntington accompanied the Baroness to the dressing-room. The magnificent gems were flashing on the superb throat, and Mrs. Huntington thought how well they were suited to each other, and pitied the little lady from her heart as she accompanied her to a retired corner and offered to unclasp the necklace for her. The Baroness declined this kind office, and herself unfastened the clasp; but she did so with trembling fingers, and the heavy necklace slipped forward like a glittering serpent over her fair bosom into the folds of her corsage. The Baroness instantly withdrew the necklace, and handed it to Mrs. Huntington, remarking with a sweet smile: "It almost seem as if those gem have affection of me, to nestle on my hearts."

Mrs. Huntington murmured the polite hope that they would soon be reinstated permanently in the Baroness's possession; but the Baroness shook her head. "I have one feeling," she said, "that I have now justly to wear zose necklace on ze last time. I wish you of him much happiness."

She turned as she was leaving the room, and took Mrs. Huntington's hand. "I have one favor zat I hope you will make to me," she said. "If my husband cannot make his possibles to redeem the neck-

lace of ze time promised, you will not sell him, but will keep him for yourselves."

"Why do you wish this?" Mrs. Huntington asked.

"It is not zat I should not like every one to wear him, but zat I should like to know to whom it shall be own. Zat is not for myself, you comprehend. Ze money of zat necklace has justly secure to me a joy more precious as diamonds, and for which I shall not cease to sank ze Madonna and your husband. To me ze necklace is now as nosings, — but I have a son, who may some day make to himself some fortunes, and it may be to him ze happiness to buy back his mozer's jewels of your children for his bride. All my happiness is now of my boy."

The Baroness was suddenly silent, as a shadow fell across the entrance of the dressing-room. The Baron stood there erect and dignified, waiting for his wife. He wore several jewelled medals on his breast, and from one of them fluttered a bit of crimson ribbon. Mrs. Huntington started, for at the first glance it seemed a tiny rill of blood. She pressed the hand of the Baroness, and promised in a whisper that she would use her influence with her husband to persuade him not to dispose of the necklace; and the two women parted. Mrs. Huntington felt a profound pity for a sorrow which she could not quite understand. She saw the grief and the mother love in the beautiful eyes in the one swift glance. It was as though a curtain had been withdrawn for an instant and then dropped.

Mrs. Huntington showed her mother-in-law the necklace the next morning, and then Mr. Huntington returned it to the bank. Shortly after the papers announced that the Baron and Baroness had sailed for Brazil.

Time passed by, and the necklace was not redeemed. Grandmother Huntington grew more and more childish; but her mind held a tenacious grasp on every detail connected with the necklace. She knew that it was now legally her son's property, and exactly how much it had cost him; and although she had seen it but once, she could tell exactly how many small stones were set in the central star, and which of the great solitaires was a little off color. Not a morning passed but she asked her son to bring it home when he returned in the evening. Not an evening but she reproached him for not bringing it.

Mr. Huntington had no notion of intrusting so costly a plaything to the care of the half-demented old lady, and seeing an opportunity for making a profitable investment, he determined to sell the necklace.

It happened that the day that he made this decision was the one on which he was to join his family at their country home at Little Wisdom. Mr. Huntington took the case of jewels from the vault of the bank, and carried it about town all day in the inner pocket of his coat, but did not find time to take it to any city jeweller. He found himself on the train that afternoon with the precious package still on his

person. He told himself that it did not greatly matter. The popular summer resort of Great Folly was near Little Wisdom, and there was a jewelry establishment there where it was just possible that he could arrange for its sale; and if not, he could take it back with him on his next trip to the city.

As he took his seat in the car, he noticed at a little distance from him Mr. Arthur Glitter, whom he had met several years before in Europe, — a virtuoso in gems, and the buyer for a prominent London house. Mr. Huntington remembered that when he last met Mr. Glitter he was on his return from Persia, and he had entertained the company with an account of an interview which he had had with the Shah relative to the purchase of jewels. It seemed to Mr. Huntington that this was possibly an excellent opportunity to dispose of the necklace, and he changed his seat and entered into conversation with Mr. Glitter. The lapidary was making a business tour in the United States, and explained that he was on his way to New Mexico to investigate a newly discovered mine of turquoises. Mr. Huntington told him the story of the necklace; and as he did not care to display the diamonds in the car, invited him to stop at Little Wisdom and dine at Huntington House. The invitation was accepted, and after the dinner Mr. Huntington took from his breast-pocket the case and handed it to Mr. Glitter. The man's eyes gleamed with surprise, admiration, and, as it seemed to Mr. Huntington, with cupidity. Then the expression

suddenly changed, and an inscrutable look settled down over his features like a mask.

"It is very cleverly managed," he said slowly, "very cleverly managed. I was entirely deceived at first glance. The setting is very handsome, the workmanship is fine, but—the stones are paste."

"You are certainly mistaken. The diamonds are of the finest quality; an expert from Tiffany's pronounced them so before I took the necklace."

Mr. Glitter smiled incredulously.

"Do you fancy that I am lying, that I am trying to deceive you?"

"Not at all; but, my friend, you are yourself deceived. I do not wonder, for those solitaires are of the finest pebble quartz, and the smaller stones in the star are of the best Parisian paste. Any one but an expert would find it impossible to tell the difference."

"But I tell you that they have been guaranteed by an expert."

"Then one of three things must be true, — either the expert was not up in his profession, or he had received a bribe to assist in the imposture, or else the stones have been changed."

"The first two alternatives are impossible. The lapidary in question is incorruptibly honest, and an authority on all vexed questions."

"Then consider the third possibility. It is a very common expedient for rogues to sell a real diamond, and then on some pretext obtain possession of the piece of jewelry for a short time, pry the real

diamond from its setting, and replace it with an imitation one."

"But the Baron and Baroness have had no opportunity to do such a thing—" Mr. Huntington paused suddenly, for he thought of the ball. "My dear," he said, stepping to the door and calling Mrs. Huntington, "will you oblige us by coming here for one moment?"

Mrs. Huntington joined the two gentlemen, and the case was stated and the question put to her. "Do you think that the Baroness could have handed the necklace to any one at the ball who could have tampered with it while she was dancing? A skilled goldsmith could remove and set stones very rapidly."

"Impossible," Mrs. Huntington asserted; "my eyes never left the necklace throughout the entire evening."

"There is still another way in which the fraud could have been effected," Mr. Glitter suggested; "a fac-simile necklace may have previously been made in Paris, with paste instead of genuine diamonds, but exactly similar in every other respect. Then it would have been only the work of an instant to have substituted the imitation for the real."

"To have done this," Mrs. Huntington mused, "the Baroness must have unfastened the clasp at the back of her neck, and removed the necklace from her throat, which would inevitably have attracted my attention if attempted in the ball-room. It could only have been done in the dressing-room, and there

I was with her both before and after the ball. I fastened the real one on her neck, and stood beside her when she took it off and handed it to me."

A sudden memory flashed through Mrs. Huntington's mind and deepened to a suspicion. What of that instant when the necklace slipped from the Baroness's neck? When her hand glided inside her corsage, could she not have withdrawn, not the original necklace, but another artfully secreted there? It was perfectly possible, and, as she thought of it, quite probable that this was the case. And yet the Baroness had seemed so sweetly innocent, such an angel of sadness and love, touched with the sacred pathos of a secret grief. Was it only clever acting to draw her attention from the necklace? Mrs. Huntington's blood boiled with indignation at having been so basely deceived. This adventuress was probably laughing at the stupidity of her dupes. She came back from her reverie just in time to hear her husband say: "It does not matter greatly just how the fraud was accomplished, since it is effected. I think I regret the wrench which it has given to my confidence in human nature more than the mere money loss, though that is a serious one. After all, it is as pretty a bauble as when we imagined that it represented a large sum. My dear, you can wear it now; none of your lady friends will be able to tell the difference, and you will not be tormented by any dread of its being stolen."

"Nothing could induce me to wear imitation

jewelry," Mrs. Huntington replied with spirit. "It may however serve to amuse grandma."

Mr. Glitter coughed. "The necklace is not altogether worthless," he said. "As I remarked, the workmanship is fine. I may be able to dispose of it as a piece of stage property to some actress. I will give you twenty-five dollars, which is more than you could obtain from any one else, for I assure you that the diamonds are absolutely valueless."

"Thank you," Mr. Huntington replied, "but my wife's last suggestion was a good one. My mother has a fancy amounting to a mania for trinkets. She has long desired this particular necklace; and if it gives her pleasure it will serve a useful purpose."

A look of disappointment came into Mr. Glitter's face. "If you ever change your mind," he said, producing his card, "this is my address, and I will be happy to purchase the necklace. It is really a curiosity in imitation, and I have taken a fancy to it on account of its history. You need not fear its ever coming into the market, or getting into the hands of unprincipled persons, and implicating you as a party in attempting to defraud. I would be as careful of that as you of course will be. It is like owning counterfeit money which must be kept from circulation. I would simply lock it in my little collection of curios." He took up the necklace and examined it lingeringly, as though loath to relinquish it.

Suddenly, as though the idea had just struck him, he exclaimed: "Most remarkable coincidence, I have

an order from a museum for paste models of famous precious stones. Several of these large ones would serve very well. I will give you in exchange several cameos from a lot which I obtained in Naples."

He took from his pocket a chamois-skin bag containing some finely cut cameos. Mrs. Huntington examined them with interest; but Mr. Huntington, annoyed by the man's pertinacity, hardly glanced at them and replied: "I have already explained that my mother has taken a fancy to this necklace. I would rather please her than to dispose of it as you suggest."

A servant entered, and announced that the carriage which Mr. Huntington had ordered to take Mr. Glitter to Great Folly, in time to catch the Western express, was at the door.

Mr. Glitter tossed the necklace from him with exaggerated indifference, and was soon speeding over the road to the neighboring town.

Mrs. Huntington lifted the necklace sadly. It hurt her to think that the grief and longing which she had seen in those beautiful eyes were only simulated. She had believed in the Baroness so thoroughly. She carried the necklace into Grandmother Huntington's room, and told her that it was a present from her son. Grandmother Huntington's sunken eyes lighted with the delight which comes from the fulfilment of a desire long deferred; and as she caressed the necklace and hobbled away to lock it securely in a little black trunk in which she kept her treasures, Mrs. Huntington had not the heart to tell her that the stones were not genuine.

Mr. Huntington might safely have trusted the real jewels in her care, for Grandmother Huntington guarded the necklace most jealously. She fancied that the little trunk might be carried away bodily, and finding that it would fit in the top drawer of her bureau, placed it there and double-locked it. Both keys she kept in a little black velvet bag, which she wore suspended chatelaine-wise at her belt. Sometimes she opened the trunk to gloat over her treasure, arraying herself in the necklace and spending hours at a time in looking at herself in her mirror, and in mumbling broken bits of dialogue, which she fancied that she was carrying on at some grand assembly,—a pitiable exhibition of imbecility. Then she would awake from her day-dreams, lock her necklace away, and for days be the same acute old lady, with a sharp eye to the actualities of every-day life. She had never once allowed the necklace out of her own hands until the night of the Portrait Party.

It chanced that on that day Mr. Glitter had called, on his return from his Western trip, and had been invited to remain to the little entertainment. He had consented to do so, and had been quite helpful in arranging the tableaux. It was he who had suggested to Trix that she might borrow her grandmother's necklace, and he had added a word of persuasion when the old lady demurred.

There was a train which stopped at Little Wisdom at half-past eleven, and he declined the invitation of the Huntingtons to spend the night, and was driven

to the station immediately after the close of the entertainment. Riggers must have been mistaken therefore in his impression that it was Mr. Glitter whom he had seen on the lawn, and who had tried the windows at midnight. It was only a vague impression; and he was not at all acquainted with Mr. Glitter, having only seen him at the Portrait Party.

The Huntingtons, who were not specially drawn to him at first, had been won over by his affability of manner. There were only two members of the family who distrusted him; and these were Grandmother Huntington and Billy.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROBBERY.

WHEN Grandmother Huntington went to her room after the tableaux, she was unusually excited. She sat down before the little toilet-table, and looked long at her reflection in the tiny glass. To speak more accurately, it was the reflection of the diamonds that she was studying, and not her own wrinkled face. She moved the candle from side to side to bring out their lustre, and shook her head coquettishly in order that they might sparkle more brilliantly. Then she rose and went through the steps of a stately old minuet, with Nathaniel P. Willis, General Lafayette, and Prince Albert, Victoria's lamented spouse, for her fancied partners. It was her shadow flitting to and fro that the mysterious stranger on the lawn had been watching.

Having relieved her imagination by these antics, Grandmother Huntington removed her necklace, double-locked it in the little trunk and in the top bureau-drawer, and retired to her couch.

There was one circumstance which troubled her. She slept in the wing of the house, a little isolated from the other bedrooms, and had herself chosen

this locality in order to be away from the children's noise. Mr. Huntington had an electric alarm placed over his bed connected with a button just over his mother's, which she could press at any time in the night, and thus call him to her in case of sickness or any need. He had explained this arrangement to Mr. Glitter, as he was showing him over the house that afternoon, and Mr. Glitter had praised the contrivance.

But Grandmother Huntington did not rely greatly on the electric alarm. She was sure it would be out of order and fail her in any real time of need, and she had provided herself with a watchman's rattle, which uttered a frightful and astounding racket when swung by vigorous hands.

This rattle was little Jack's special admiration. He had borrowed it upon one occasion to take to a college ball game, and it had joined bravely in the chorus of tin horns which cheered the triumphing crimson. Jack had begged for it again at the dinner-table, to applaud the favorite tableaux; but it had been decided that this was too noisy a demonstration for indoors. Nevertheless, when, as Grandmother Huntington prepared to retire, she missed her rattle from its accustomed place, she naturally concluded that Jack had availed himself of it without permission. That its blatant scur-r-r! had not been heard after any of the tableaux, did not surprise her. Jack had probably weakened after obtaining possession of the coveted object, and had not dared to face the



THE BURGLAR IN GRANDMOTHER HUNTINGTON'S ROOM.

consequences of swinging it. If only he had replaced it, Grandmother Huntington could have forgiven him. As it was, she went to bed with the firm determination of making it unpleasant for Jack if anything happened.

Something did happen. About one o'clock the old lady awoke with a start. She knew instantly that the sound which had wakened her was the opening of a bureau drawer, and she divined instinctively what bureau drawer it was. But though she had awakened suddenly, the habit of long caution controlled her, and she did not instantly open her eyes. Immediately through her closed lids she felt the light of a dark lantern flashed upon her face, and then withdrawn. She waited a moment, and then peered cautiously toward the bureau. Yes, there was a man standing before the open drawer. How she longed for her watchman's rattle ; but she slipped her hand to the wall and punched the electric button, once, twice, three times with great vigor. Ordinarily she could hear the alarm echoing down the long hall, but now the house was silent. " Just as I knew it would be ! " thought Grandmother Huntington, with a sort of triumph in having predicted the failure. She stole another peep at the burglar. He had taken out the little trunk, and was fitting a key in the lock. The poor woman was frozen stiff with terror. Would the key fit? In another instant the lid flew back, and the man held her precious necklace in his hand. The sight pierced Grandmother Huntington to the heart. She attempted to shriek, but she could not

utter a sound, and the man turned to leave the room. In doing so, he passed her bed; he held the dark lantern in one hand, and with the other was just about to slip the necklace into his pocket. The sight nerved Grandmother Huntington to desperation. With one wild shriek she leaped from the bed, like a catamount upon its prey, and tore the necklace from the man's grasp. He caught it again, and backed from the room, pulling it from her and striking at her with the lantern. The stones cut her fingers; but she held on bravely with both hands, and let him drag her after him, shrieking at every step. He struck her on the head with the lantern, and the light went out, leaving them in total darkness. They were in the hall now; and Grandmother Huntington resisted with all her might, yelling like a mad woman. Suddenly Mr. Huntington threw open his door, and stood at the end of the hall, holding a lamp above his head. A burst of light streamed upon them. The man let go the necklace, and plunged down the staircase. But Grandmother Huntington did not faint upon the spot; she was smarting with the blows of the lantern, and with rage at having so nearly lost her necklace. She gave the man one frantic push from behind as he stood on the staircase, — a push which sent him crashing head over heels to the bottom. Mr. Huntington stepped back for his revolver; but though he was gone but an instant, when he reached the staircase the hall door was open and the burglar had escaped. Grandmother Huntington stood on the

landing, a comical spectacle in a striped blazer of Humphrey's, which she had adopted as a bed-gown and wore over her nightdress, and her head swathed with a flannel petticoat with which she replaced the decorous black wig of the daytime. This petticoat had possibly saved her life, for a little rill of blood was trickling down her face from one gash on the forehead received from the broken lantern. But though wounded and excited, she was not frightened now, and she flourished the necklace triumphantly, exclaiming, "He did n't get it! He was n't so smart as he thought he was, — the villain!"

"Mother, you are a real heroine!" said Mr. Huntington; "to think of an able-bodied burglar being actually deprived of his booty and kicked downstairs by an old lady eighty years old."

"I did n't kick him," Grandmother Huntington replied; "I would n't do anything so unladylike. I only gave him a leetle mite of a push, and I guess he was in such a hurry to get away that he jumped clean from the top to the bottom. And now I just want to know who was right about that electric bell; and if I can lay my hands on Jack, I'll spank him for stealing my rattle, sure as taxes!"

Mr. Huntington examined the electric wire, and found that it was cut in the hall. "The burglar must have done it before entering your room," he said; "but he was surprisingly well informed in regard to the house to have known about it."

All of the family, who were now thoroughly roused,

gathered around and heard the story with interest amounting to excitement. "To think," said Mrs. Huntington, in confidence to her husband, "that some one should have gone to the trouble to attempt a burglary, and that your mother should have perilled her life in defence of a *paste* necklace!"

"It does seem absurd," replied her husband; "but evidently the man who attempted the theft thought that the diamonds were genuine. I wonder who it could have been."

Mr. Huntington had followed the burglar to the hall door, but had found no traces of him, and he did not care to investigate the grounds that night.

"It is strange that Billy did not give the alarm," Trix said.

"When I locked the door for the night," Mr. Huntington replied, "Billy was following that little Brazilian fellow who lives at the parsonage. I should n't wonder if he went home with him; and, by the way, the boy did say that he saw a man lurking in the grounds. I will call at the parsonage and question him in the morning."

Grandmother Huntington could give no clear description of the burglar, other than that he wore a black silk mask which concealed his features. Her attention had been riveted on the necklace, and she had neglected to scrutinize the man. Jack, on being reprimanded for stealing her rattle, stoutly denied the theft; and it was not like Jack to refuse to own up to any fault which he had committed.

"The burglar probably removed it while you were asleep," Mr. Huntington suggested. But Grandmother Huntington insisted that she had searched for it before retiring, and that it was not then in the room.

"This would seem to indicate," said Mr. Huntington, "that the thief was in your room some time during the day, possibly while we were in the barn attending the Portrait Party. Go to bed again, all of you, and perhaps the morning will throw some light upon the mystery."

But the morning only made matters more mysterious. Riggers appeared at the house before Mr. Huntington started for the parsonage, bringing with him the watchman's rattle which he said he had found just outside the grounds on his way home. He was much excited by the account of the attempted robbery, and at once gave his opinion that the man whom he saw in the shrubbery must have been the burglar.

"I wanted to ask you about the man," said Mr. Huntington; "what did he look like?"

"I sink him to be ze strange man who was at ze tableau," said Riggers, "who sat by Mrs. Huntington, — ze man wiz ze foxy face."

"He means Mr. Glitter," said Humphrey.

"Why do you think it was Mr. Glitter?" Mr. Huntington asked.

"He wore a light overcoat like ze gentleman put on after ze tableau."

"Did you see his face plainly?"

"No; he had on one big hat zat flap down so."

"The man grandmother saw wore a mask. Did this man have one on?"

"No, but his face was in darkness; I could not precisely see it."

"And yet you are sure that it was Mr. Glitter?"

"I sink so. I sink Billee sink so too."

"Why?"

"Because when we come from ze tableau he try walk beside ze grandmuzzer, and Billee he walk zare very close. Mr. Glitter he try push in, Billee snarl, and Mr. Glitter say very low, 'Damn ze dog.'"

"That's so," said Humphrey; "I was on the other side of grandmother, and I heard him."

"Zen, when Billee jump at him on ze veranda, he say ze same sing, only more loud, as before."

"I wonder where Billy is," said Jack.

"This is all nonsense," said Mr. Huntington, after a moment's thought. "Mike drove Mr. Glitter to the station immediately after the tableaux. Call Mike, Humphrey, and see what he can tell us."

Mike appeared at once. "Did you see the gentleman off last evening?" Mr. Huntington asked.

"I did that."

"Are you sure that he took the half-past eleven train?"

"By the same token that I saw him mount the shteps of the cars, sor. He was in a great fluster for fear that we would not get there in toime; but whin we arroived at the station, there we were tin minutes ahead of the train. 'You need n't wait for

me,' says he, as polite as you plaze. 'The masther towld me to see yez on the cars,' says oi. 'It's all the same seein' me to the daypoo', says he. 'Begging your honner's pardon, it is n't,' says oi. So oi towld the station-masther to flag the train, and oi waited, and he shtomped up and down the platform. 'You'd better boi your ticket,' says oi. 'Oi've a pass,' says he; and that was all he said till the thrain came thunderin' in. Thin I see him mount the shteps; and the harses was that narvous that I did n't wait for the thrain to start, but druv away."

"You see," said Mr. Huntington, "that it could not have been Mr. Glitter, for Mike saw him leave."

"Mike he see him get on, but he might get off on ze uzzer side," said Riggers.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Huntington again. "Besides, the thief who attempted to steal that necklace would not have done so if he had not thought it worth a great deal of money; and Mr. Glitter knew perfectly well that it was valueless."

"It looked just like my muzzer's," said Riggers, "and her necklace was cost many tousand dollar."

Mr. Huntington gave an exclamation of surprise. "Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Huntington; "strange as it certainly is, this is the son of the Baron da Silva."

"Then you are the son of a —" Mrs. Huntington laid a warning hand on her husband's arm.

Mike, who had not gone away, now spoke up: "If you plaze, sor, would you shtep out and see what ails the dog, sor? He's got himself hurted the night, sor."

They all followed Mike to the barn, where Billy lay moaning on the hay. A brief inspection showed that he had been struck on the head by some heavy object. Mike sponged away the blood. He would evidently lose one eye, and possibly his skull was fractured, and he might die.

"The dog was with you when I saw him last," said Mr. Huntington to Riggers. The boy protested that Billy had left him at the gate, and had run back toward the house.

"I found him here in the barn, sor; but he's hurt so bad he couldn't have dragged himself from far. Most-like he was left for dead, and came out of his stundness afther the man that hurt him had gone,—bad luck to him intoirely."

"He will find that this has brought him bad luck," said Mr. Huntington, "for I mean to investigate this matter thoroughly."

Humphrey and Jack walked to the gate, talking to Riggers. Trix lingered, watching Mike who was binding up Billy's head.

Mr. Huntington spoke in a low voice to his wife: "I distrust that Da Silva boy. He is glib with his tongue; but his attempt to throw suspicion on Mr. Glitter seems to me a manifest falsehood, a clumsy blind to divert it from himself."

"My dear, you surely cannot mean that the boy knows the history of the necklace, and that it was he who attempted to steal it?"

"No; he surely could not have known the entire

history, or he would not have made any effort to regain it. But suppose that he knew only that his parents had parted with the real necklace; then is it not quite as likely that he would attempt to steal it as that his parents should have done so? Like father, like son, you know."

Trix spoke up impulsively: "It is perfectly impossible. Riggers was not the burglar. I should think you could tell by his manner that he is innocent."

"I did not know that you heard me, Trix, or I would not have spoken as I did. Say nothing to the others of my suspicions. After all, it is of no great consequence. The burglar did not succeed in getting the necklace; it was worthless if he had secured it. The only mischief done is to poor Billy."

"I think it is of great consequence," Trix replied. "Riggers is accused of a crime, and I think you ought to investigate the matter thoroughly for his sake."

"I accuse no one," replied her father; "if you are discreet and say nothing about it, he need never know that he has been suspected."

"But it is a wrong to him even to suspect him unjustly, and I want you to please either prove or disprove the suspicion. You said you would do so when he was here a moment ago."

Mr. Huntington made a gesture of impatience. "You make a mountain of a molehill," he said. "I have no time to make a detective of myself simply to prove whether this boy is or is not trustworthy. I have frightened the boy by what I said. He will not

attempt anything more in future, and we can protect ourselves a little more carefully. I have no wish to be vindictive, and to pursue him further."

Trix burst into tears. "Don't you see how unjust you are?" she cried; "you take it for granted that he is the thief. Now I just know that he was not, and I think you will be really wicked if you do not sift the whole thing thoroughly."

"Trix is right," said Mrs. Huntington, thoughtfully. "If we do not ascertain the true culprit, we shall always feel unpleasantly toward this boy, perhaps doing him a great wrong. He has a winsome face, and I feel strongly drawn toward him."

"You were drawn toward his mother; and yet she was an accomplice, if not the principal, in the theft of the real necklace."

Mrs. Huntington was silenced, but Trix took up the argument. "And then the burglar is just as likely to be proved to have been neither Riggers nor Mr. Glitter, but some one who is prowling around at large, waiting for a chance to do more mischief; and in that case you certainly ought to have him arrested."

"Very well," said Mr. Huntington, smiling, and pinching his daughter's chin; "for these and for many more reasons, the investigation shall proceed."

"How will you carry it on?" Trix asked.

"That is telling," Mr. Huntington replied. "I promise to let you know the result, and ask you meantime to let no one know that we suspect the boy whom you call Riggers."

Mr. Huntington then went to his library, and wrote an account of the attempted robbery to the chief of the Detective Bureau in New York, ending with a request that a detective capable of attending to the case should be immediately sent to Little Wisdom.

Having finished his letter, Mr. Huntington opened it again, and added the following: —

“ P. S. Send some one who can talk and read Portuguese.”

CHAPTER V.

PERCY'S SECRET.

AFTER this ripple of excitement, Little Wisdom settled down into the quiet which was its normal condition. A summer visitor who missed the fashion and gayety usual to crowded resorts, characterized the place as "tepid." "The water," she wrote, "is tepid, the air is tepid, and the society is tepid."

This might be true of the summer visitors; but the old residents of Little Wisdom had marked characteristics of their own, and were distinctly either hot or cold, though their lives were often barren of incident, and ran on for months in what Trix was pleased to call "the even tenor and soprano of their way." But while the surface was smooth, the currents of character were running fiercely and cutting deep channels beneath. There were hidden forces at work which were moulding and forming the six boys, while there was little to chronicle in the daily events. The Fire Company met and drilled and paraded, but without the desired red buckets which were to add such *éclat* to their proceedings. Just why this crown-

ing glory was not added, Percy could have explained had he chosen to do so, but he did not choose.

Bricktop had taken the gate-money at the Portrait Party, in a tomato can, and had counted it out to Percy, as captain of the company, at the close of the performance. By good rights it should have gone to the treasurer; but they had neglected to elect such an officer, and it seemed most fitting that Percy should take charge of the funds and expend them. They amounted to nine dollars and twenty cents, principally in dimes and nickels; and Percy had tied the coins securely in his handkerchief, and stuffed them into his pocket.

His family had left for home before him; and as he loitered down the street with Bricktop, the latter chanced to remark: "This would be a good night to have our fortunes told by Mrs. Harrigan. It's beautiful moonlight."

Mrs. Harrigan was an old woman who lived in a tumble-down house on a lonely side-hill back of the burying-ground, a little off from the road to Great Folly. Superstitious people said that her house was haunted, and that she was a witch. She had an insane daughter, whose shrieks were sometimes heard by passers on the road; and her son had been in prison, and was sometimes away for long periods of time together. Mrs. Harrigan insisted that he was a good son, and contributed to her support; but strange stories were told of all the family, and respectable people kept aloof from them. Mrs. Harrigan told

fortunes with cards, and Percy was curious to hear what she might say of him. The night was a lovely one; he was not ready for sleep, but pleasantly excited from the tableaux, and Bricktop's suggestion chimed in with his mood.

"I'll go, if you will," he said.

"Father would thump me if I did," Bricktop replied.

"How is he to know? It is n't much out of the way to your place. We won't stay long, and he need never know but that you came directly home."

"I never deceived father yet," said Bricktop.

"You need n't deceive any one now. All you've got to do is not to mention it unless you are asked. He knows you went to the Portrait Party, and it will never occur to him that you stopped anywhere on the way home."

"He may not think of it, but mother will. I never saw anything like mothers for keeping track of fellows. They find out everything. Sister Amy went with the Stebbinses, and mother will want to know why I am later."

"I heard your sister say that she was going to stay all night at the Stebbinses'; so there you are all safe. Tell your mother if you want to, but be good enough not to mention me!" Percy spoke confidently, for he knew that Bricktop would go with him and would keep silent.

They walked through the cemetery, for this was the shortest way. The stones gleamed white and



PERCY AND BRICKTOP HAVING THEIR FORTUNES TOLD.

ghostly in the moonlight, and there were mysterious shadows under the funereal evergreens, which made them quicken their pace. Percy whistled "Little Annie Rooney," making a great show of bravado to keep up his own courage; but he was relieved when they pushed through the hedge at the rear, and struck out through the underbrush toward the lonely old house on the hillside.

A man was sitting on the doorstep smoking. It was Joe, Mrs. Harrigan's ne'er-do-weel son. They would not have come if they had thought of his being at home, for they did not care to be associated with him; but it was too late to retreat now, for he had seen them and had risen, and was slowly knocking the ashes out of his pipe. Percy stated his errand, and they went into the house. Mrs. Harrigan lighted a lamp, and produced a greasy pack of cards, with which she proceeded to cast their futures. She muttered a quantity of nonsense, — a fair-haired girl and a dark-haired girl, troubles which were to be dissipated in a wonderful manner, a sickness, a journey, and money. This was all, — except, yes, there was an enemy. Percy must beware of a dark-haired rival. At the close of this gibberish she demanded that the boys should cross her palm with silver, — that is, should each pay her a quarter. The fortune was a little disappointing. As Percy remarked, he could have made up a better one himself; but she must be paid, and he had no money with him but the Fire Company funds, and he rightly

hesitated to display them. He asked Bricktop to pay for them both; but on consulting an old pocket-book, his friend found that he had only fifteen cents with him.

There was nothing to be done but to borrow from the fund. After all, it was only fifty cents, and he could replace it when he reached home. He dragged out his handkerchief and untied the knots with nervous fingers, — so nervous that he spilled the coins, and they rolled in every direction over the kitchen floor.

Joe Harrigan, who had been sitting in the chimney-corner sipping gin and water from time to time, sprang forward and assisted in picking up the small pieces.

“I told you you were to have money,” whined the old woman; “and here it is, loads of it. Remember the poor, young man, remember the poor, and you will be lucky all your days.”

“Shut up, mother!” said her dutiful son. “Have n’t you got more pride than to beg of the young gent? She’s losing her wits, she is, and I can see that you don’t feel that you’ve had your money’s worth in your fortunes. Gimme the cards, and I’ll show you some fun free gratis, for nothing. Take a hand, mother, and we’ll have a game of poker with the young gents.”

“But I don’t know the game,” said Bricktop. “I don’t know any game of cards.”

“Never mind; I’ll learn you,” said Joe Harrigan. “You play, of course?” he continued, turning to Percy.

“I can play Old Maid, and Hearts,” Percy replied,

rather proud of these accomplishments in wickedness, which had been acquired without the knowledge of his family.

"Then mother will help you, and I'll coach your friend. My! you ought to know how to play poker. It's the great game at college. I can learn you lots of tricks. There's nothing about poker that I don't know. It's a good chance for you to get posted, if you ain't too stuck up to learn a thing or two from the likes of us."

There was something threatening in his tone; and Percy whispered to Bricktop, who was edging to the door, "We had better conciliate him," and seated himself at the table, attempting to look quite at his ease.

Mrs. Harrigan mixed some hot water, gin, and sugar, and poured it into cracked tumblers; but the boys had the good sense to decline this refreshment. Joe, however, imbibed frequently, and became loquacious and friendly. He gave the boys so many "points" in regard to the game that Bricktop was unable to retain them, and his head buzzed with utter confusion. Percy, however, became interested, and profited so well by the instruction that with the aid of Mrs. Harrigan's knowledge and of Bricktop's blunders, he found himself winning. This infuriated the now half-drunken Joe, and he insisted that there should be no helping, and that the stakes should be ten-cent pieces.

Percy objected: He did not wish to play for

money, and he explained that it was not his own; but Joe shook his fist in Percy's face, and swore that he would beat him if he did not comply with his wishes. Percy, thoroughly frightened, played on; and now the luck turned in favor of Joe. Percy was too much alarmed to put in practice his newly acquired knowledge; and perhaps it was quite as well that he could not do so, for Joe grew terribly excited whenever fortune seemed on the point of deserting him. It was after one o'clock, and still Joe would not let them leave the table. The boys wondered whether they were to be kept all night, when suddenly there was a welcome interruption. Some one knocked, and Mrs. Harrigan went out into the hall. Joe seized all the cards, hid them in the wood-box, and raking the money from the table, deposited it in his own pocket. Then he sat still and listened. A man was speaking.

"I saw your light from the road," he said, "and have made my way here with great difficulty, for I have sprained my ankle while attempting to walk from Great Folly to Little Wisdom. I cannot drag myself another step; and I beg you to let me spend the night here. I will pay you well for my lodging." At this announcement Joe seized the lamp and joined his mother in the hall; and the two boys without a word sprang out of an open window on the other side of the house, and made good their escape. They hardly dared speak until they had put the cemetery between them and the home of the Harrigans.

"That man came in the nick of time," said Percy; "if it had n't been for him, I don't know that we would ever have got away. Wasn't it the worst scrape you ever heard of? And that villain has got all the tableaux money."

"We can make him give it up," said Bricktop. "Father will go there in the morning with the constable, and make him disgorge."

"You promised not to tell your father, and you must keep your word. I would n't have it known that I had been playing poker with Joe Harrigan for any amount of money. I'll make up the nine dollars to the Fire Company. Only stand by me, Bricktop, and don't breathe a syllable, and I'll stand by you. You know you are as deep in the mud as I am in the mire."

"We did n't either of us mean any harm," replied Bricktop. "Joe Harrigan just *made* us play, and he took that money; he did n't even win it. Father will be mad, but I would rather tell him than keep it from him."

"Then you will be as mean as dirt to go back on your word and get me into trouble. If you tell, I'll never forgive you, Ned Heywood, in all my life. You will be a mean, contemptible sneak."

"If you feel that way," said Bricktop, reluctantly, "I'll not tell; but what am I to say when mother asks me where I've been?"

"Say you've been to see me; I rather think she will think my society more improving than that of Joe Harrigan."

Bricktop was silenced ; but it is doubtful whether the influence which Percy exerted over him was not really more harmful than any contact with the despised Joe Harrigan could have been.

He found the door left unbolted for him. No one wakened when he entered, or questioned him in the morning ; but the night's experience lay heavy on his conscience, and he longed to make a clean breast of it. He spoke to Percy afterward of the stranger whom they had heard asking shelter for the night.

"I wish we could have warned him," said Bricktop, "of the den he had fallen into. I wonder whether they robbed and murdered him before morning."

"Just like them," Percy replied ; "but you don't catch me going up there again to investigate. It's none of our funerals, anyway."

This was the reason why Percy was glad that Riggers had allowed Lady Caroline to think that he was the one who had returned so late on the night of the Portrait Party. Percy's parents had slept soundly that night. Dr. Coffin always did so ; and gentle Mrs. Coffin had been overwearied, and had not been as wakeful as was her wont. Only Lady Caroline had slept with one eye open, and knew that one of the boys had not entered until the small hours of the morning. Percy did not intend to tell Riggers the entire adventure. He would have done so but for the loss of the Company's funds, but he wished to keep this a secret ; and it was a thorn in his side that Bricktop knew the true state of affairs.

He was often asked why he did not purchase the fire-buckets ; and when he put the boys off with some excuse, Bricktop's questioning gaze angered and humiliated him. It was not what he had done, but the fear lest it should be known, — not his own consciousness of having committed an unworthy action, but the disapproval of other people — which troubled him. Percy was bartering the substance for the semblance of things. He wanted to be thought the soul of honor, but he had no love of honor for honor's sake.

He was in Miss Letitia's store with Trix a few days later, when Mrs. Harrigan came in. Percy was in mortal terror for fear that she would speak to him and possibly refer to his call at her house. He strove to draw Trix to the opposite side of the shop, professing a great interest in the motley array of Yankee notions displayed there ; for Mrs. Harrigan stood between them and the door, and effectually prevented his escape.

He need not have been alarmed, for the poor woman stood as much in dread of him as he of her. She had asked Miss Letitia for some "chloroform liniment or something good for a sprained ankle," before she noticed Percy. When she saw him, she would have retreated precipitately, for she feared that he might demand his money and drag her away to the magistrate. But apparently Percy had not noticed her, and Miss Letitia was holding out the bottle, and, prompted half by curiosity, half by a desire to show kindly interest, had asked, —

"Has Joe hurt himself?"

"Joe has gone away on the railroad," Mrs. Harrigan replied, desirous of imparting the news to Percy that her son was beyond reach. "Joe's got a chance to work in a machine-shop in York State. The liniment is for a boarder of mine."

"You don't say! Well, I presume to say you're glad enough Joe's got work. There's more than you, if the truth was known, whose boys are more of a comfort out of the house than they are to him. Here's your change. Sha'n't I do the bottle up in a paper for you? Who did you say it was hurt their ankle? Land sakes, what's your hurry?" for Mrs. Harrigan had snatched the liniment and had made off with it. Percy was much relieved.

"She need n't be so set up all of a sudden because she's got a boarder," said Miss Letitia, much incensed. "It can't be anybody *much*, or they would n't put up with her. I presume to say it's only one of those Poleander foreigners, who has hurt himself chopping wood on the mountain."

Percy was much relieved by Mrs. Harrigan's avoidance of him. He had heard enough, too, to convince him that the man who had applied for lodging had not been made away with by foul means. He had said that he had hurt his ankle, and it was doubtless for him that Mrs. Harrigan was purchasing the liniment. She had spoken of him proudly as her "boarder;" therefore he was in no danger from her, and Joe, the wretch, was far away. This was news that would relieve Bricktop's apprehensions.

Percy found himself musing over Miss Letitia's conjecture in regard to the stranger. He did not believe with her that the man was one of the ignorant emigrants who sought work in that vicinity during the summer. His accent had been pure ; and the words, though touched with pain, were gentlemanly.

His thoughts took another direction on reaching home, for he found another stranger domiciled in his own family, — a dark-haired young man who was introduced as a Mr. Raphael da Souza, a Portuguese artist. He was already on good terms with Riggers, for he had been in Brazil and they were comparing experiences in Portuguese. Percy listened to their chatter without comprehending it, and then strolled away to ask his mother why this stranger had come to visit them. It was not easy for Mrs. Coffin to dissimulate, and she hesitated as she said that Mr. da Souza had business in the vicinity, and would remain with them for a short time.

Mr. Huntington had called at the parsonage a few days before, and had confided to Dr. and Mrs. Coffin his suspicions in regard to Riggers, and his intention to have him shadowed by a detective ; and Mr. da Souza was the detective. Riggers, who was perfectly unconscious of any distrust, was delighted to meet with some one who could speak Portuguese and who had been in Brazil. Mr. da Souza had never been up the Amazons, and had not met Riggers' parents ; but he knew of them, and had been in Para and in other cities on the coast, and he understood Brazilian

customs, and was interested when Riggers talked about the plantation on which he had been brought up. It was delightful to talk to some one who understood and was sympathetic; and Riggers talked a great deal, his new-friend encouraging him, and even drawing him out when he touched on his father and mother. They walked together through the village, and Mr. da Souza offered Riggers a cigar made of Brazilian tobacco; but, much to his surprise, the boy declined it.

"I thought all Brazilians smoked," said Mr. da Souza.

"I used to," Riggers replied; "but Mrs. Coffin did not like, and to please her I gave him up. I like Mrs. Coffin verra much. I do anysing for Mrs. Coffin."

This remark prejudiced the detective, in spite of himself, in favor of Riggers. It seemed to him that a boy who was capable of denying himself in this way was not likely to be a thief. Still, one must not judge too quickly, and he set out to study the case from the outside. Mr. Huntington had told him that Riggers had left his veranda at twelve o'clock, and that the robbery had been attempted at one. The first thing to determine was the boy's whereabouts at the time of the robbery. He did not care to ask Riggers for fear of rousing his suspicions, and he inquired of Dr. and Mrs. Coffin whether they remembered at what time the boys returned from the Portrait Party. Mrs. Coffin remembered distinctly that

Lady Caroline had complained the next morning that while Percy had returned at a reasonable hour, Riggers had disturbed her by entering as late as two o'clock.

Mrs. Coffin was sorry to repeat this damaging information. Possibly her sister-in-law was mistaken, and had not counted correctly the strokes of the clock. But Lady Caroline, on being questioned, confirmed her previous statement. She had consulted her own watch, and had gone out into the hall and compared it with the family clock. She was certain that Percy came in a little after twelve, for she had spoken to him at that time, and had glanced into his room a little later and seen him quietly sleeping; while she was equally positive as to the time when Percy went downstairs and admitted Riggers. She thought that such goings-on ought not to be passed over lightly, but should be adequately punished.

"And now the question is," said the detective, "where was Riggers between one and two? Perhaps he can explain. Do not, however, allow either of the boys to imagine the drift of your questionings."

"This is perfectly simple," said pompous Dr. Coffin. "I will attend to this matter; it is a matter of family discipline, apart from any connection with the crime at the Huntingtons'."

Dr. Coffin accordingly summoned Riggers to his study. "Rodriguez," he said, in his most ominous manner, "I am sorry to hear that you were out at a scandalously late hour last Wednesday evening. You are aware that it is a rule of this house that its inmates

shall retire at ten o'clock unless on very extraordinary occasions."

"But zare was a barty," Riggers stammered, "a barty at ze Huntington, and we haf permission of Mrs. Coffin not to retire ourselves so early."

"True," replied the Doctor; "but Mrs. Coffin certainly advised you of the fact that you were expected to return before midnight." Riggers' eyes twinkled, and he was about to speak; but the Doctor went on: "Now, I have no wish to be tyrannical; but if my own son were to remain out after that hour, he knows perfectly well that I would punish him severely, — unless," he added, after a pause, "he could explain his detention satisfactorily."

Riggers had been on the point of asserting his own innocence, when this reference to Percy decided him. Percy had something to conceal which was worse than mere loitering, and his father would make good his promise of severe punishment; while he, Riggers, would be let off with a reprimand, especially as he had done nothing worse than to linger on Mr. Huntington's veranda. He therefore made up his mind not to inform on Percy.

"I hope you will be so kind to pardon me. I not do so some more," he said cheerfully.

"I must know first what you did, after the party in the barn was over."

"I sat myself on ze veranda wiz Mees Trix."

"Mr. Huntington told me that his family *all* retired at eleven, that night."

"I sat myself long time after Mees Trix went in."

"Precisely; but Mr. Huntington told me that he sent you home at midnight, and that you went away. Now, what did you do after that time?"

Riggers did not see his way out of the difficulty, and he was silent.

"Will you answer me? What did you do after you left the Huntingtons'?"

"I came home."

"It does not take two hours to walk from their place here. Did you stop anywhere on the way?"

Again Riggers was silent.

"When you have something to communicate, you can come to me," said the Doctor, sternly; "in the mean time you can go to your room."

Riggers bowed and withdrew.

The Doctor reported his failure to extract anything from the obstinate boy; and Mr. da Souza suggested: "Let your son go to him. Very often boys will confide in each other when they will not confess to older people."

Dr. Coffin called Percy, and told him to go to Riggers and find out, if possible, where he had been between twelve and two. Percy did not suspect that this had anything to do with the robbery, but thought that his father was simply displeased at the infringement of one of his rules. He found Riggers sitting despairingly with his elbows on their study-table, and his head resting on his arms.

"Oh, Percy!" he cried, "help me out, please. Your fazzer he awful mad wiz me."

"I would, old fellow," Percy replied, "but I'll tell you just how it is with me, and you can judge for yourself;" and he related the entire Harrigan experience. "Now," said he, in conclusion, "my father will just about murder me if he finds that out; but if you say so, I'll walk right up to him and confess the whole thing."

"Oh! will you?" exclaimed Riggers, his eyes shining with gratitude; "you are one hero, Percy, one hero!"

"Oh, pshaw! no," Percy replied, a little disconcerted by the avidity with which his offer was accepted, "that's nothing at all,—simply what one fellow is bound to do for another. You would do the same for me; and the only question now is, which of us needs it most,—which of us would suffer most if he had to bear the brunt. Now, you are really innocent; you've done nothing to be found out. Nothing very bad is charged against you,—nothing except being out a little after hours. If I were in your place, I wouldn't mind any little thing like that at all; while I have committed what father would think was the unpardonable sin. I have gambled away money that does n't belong to me. I throw myself on your friendship, Riggers. I am completely in your power. As I said before, if you have n't any affection for me, or any sense of the meanness of the act, you can tell father all about it, and clear yourself. I am completely in your power."

It was not exactly as he had said before; but Riggers' sense of honor rose to the occasion, as Percy knew it would. "I'll never tell on you," he said; "but, oh, Percy, what can I say when he keeps asking me where I was after twelve o'clock?"

"Why, make up some innocent little white lie. Say you were serenading the girls, or that you went fishing by moonlight or were studying astronomy. Wasn't there an occultation of Mars or something?"

"No, zat comes next week; besides, I would n't tell a lie to save myself."

"No; that is rather a mean thing to do, and I admire your principle. I would n't tell a lie to save myself, either, but to save a friend puts another face on the matter; and seeing you are so good as to stand by me, I'll show you that I can do as much for you, and I'll swallow down all scruples and lie for you, Riggers. I hope you recognize that I'm doing something for you now. I'll go right to father, and fix it all up."

"Stop, stop!" cried Riggers, "don't; I'd rather you would n't." But Percy was already tapping at the door of his father's study; and the Doctor, as he opened it, seeing Riggers half-way down the hall, ordered him back to his room.

"Well, what have you ascertained?" the Doctor asked, as Percy stood before him.

"Nothing much," Percy replied, hesitating an instant on the verge of falsehood; then bracing him-

self, he continued recklessly: "Riggers was n't doing any harm. He was only serenading Amy Heywood. He likes her, and he was rather ashamed to tell you; that was all."

"Oh! that was it, was it?" the Doctor replied, greatly relieved. "He need not have been afraid to tell me. Tell him that as he has confessed, I will not be hard with him. He may simply keep his room until to-morrow morning; and the next time he wishes to serenade he must be back at a more seasonable hour."

Percy made his report to Riggers, and the Doctor his to Mr. da Souza; but neither auditor was quite satisfied. Riggers felt that he had told a lie, through Percy. It was the first time that he had deceived any one, and he felt that he could not look the Doctor squarely in the face after this. There was also a minor cause for dissatisfaction. There was to be a tennis tournament that afternoon, and he had been assigned as Trix's partner. It was hard to be deprived of the pleasure of playing with her, for they had strong hopes of winning. They were to play against Amy Heywood and Percy; and though pretty nearly matched, Riggers was more agile and alert than Percy. He was a little comforted when Mr. da Souza offered to be his substitute, so that the game need not go by default, and he sat down to improve his hours of prison solitude by writing a long letter to his mother. When Mr. da Souza heard that he was so occupied, he took Mrs. Coffin aside and asked her

not to mail the letter until he had had an opportunity to read it. He judged rightly that if Riggers believed that the necklace belonged to his mother, it would be mentioned in this letter.

Trix was much surprised that Riggers did not appear to play tennis with her; but Mr. da Souza presented his apologies by explaining the facts of the case. Her partner was "unavoidably detained" by the Doctor on account of having serenaded Miss Heywood.

"When was that?" Amy asked; "I never heard anything of it."

"It was the night of the Portrait Party," Mr. da Souza replied.

"That night," said Amy, "I was at the Stebbinses', and Riggers knew it."

"Perhaps he serenaded you there," Trix suggested.

"It is funny, then, that none of us heard him."

Mr. da Souza reflected that the Stebbins mansion was next to the parsonage; and if the serenade had been given there, two hours was a long time to be occupied by it. But the game was called, and Amy Heywood and Percy won the match.

Trix was disappointed; for Riggers was a better player than Mr. da Souza, and she felt sure that with Riggers she might have had a chance to compete in the finals, and possibly might have won the prizes, — cunning little pins, gold rackets with pearl tennis-balls. She veiled her pique politely; and after the tournament was over, Mrs. Huntington invited the players to partake of refreshments, which were served

on their grounds. As they sat on the broad veranda, Humphrey brought out a guitar and asked if any of the company would play. Mr. da Souza took it, and the young people were soon merrily singing college songs and comic or romantic ditties. The "Walloping Window-blind" was the favorite with the greater number, though "Hey, Dolly! ho, Dolly!" was also very popular when sung by Trix.

"This is a Portuguese guitar," said Mr. da Souza, as he was tuning it.

"It belongs to Riggers," Trix replied. "He was one of the impromptu orchestra at the Portrait Party, and he left it in the barn that evening. It has been here ever since."

Mr. da Souza made a mental note of this statement, and asked himself how Riggers could have serenaded Amy Heywood if his guitar was at the Huntingtons'. He asked the question of Percy, too, as he carried the guitar home. Percy gave a long whistle.

"The story don't quite hang together, does it?" he replied; "but don't tell father. He is awfully down on Riggers now, and so is Aunt Caroline. They think him capable of any iniquity; but if he don't want to tell where he was, I say that it's nobody's business. He's a friend of mine, and I shall stand up for him, even if I don't exactly understand him."

Percy gave Mr. da Souza the impression of being a frank, manly fellow. Mr. da Souza assured him that he would not speak to the Doctor about the guitar. It was not a part of his plan that Riggers should feel

himself too much suspected; but in spite of the favorable impression which he had at first received, he could not but confess to himself that the boy's unwillingness to explain his whereabouts at the time of the robbery told very strongly against him.

CHAPTER VI.

RIGGERS' LETTER AND THE GHOST PARTY.

WHEN Mr. da Souza returned from the tennis tournament, Mrs. Coffin drew him aside and slipped something into his hand, saying, "Riggers wished me to mail this for him. I trust that it contains nothing damaging to the poor boy. I feel almost as if we had no right, even under the present circumstances to break the seal of a letter to his mother. Such confidences ought to be sacred."

"My dear Mrs. Coffin," Mr. da Souza replied, "if the boy is guiltless, we are doing him no wrong; indeed, this may be our only means of proving his innocence."

Once in his own room, Mr. da Souza moistened the envelope in warm water, and carefully opened it with his penknife. The letter was in Portuguese, and we will give a translation, preserving the quaint stilted style of the original.

PARSONAGE, LITTLE WISDOM, July 20.

MY MOST BEAUTIFUL, MOST NOBLE, AND MOST PRECIOUS LADY MOTHER,—I think of you daily, and am as sore of heart as upon the first day of our separation, though I have learned to disguise the outward signs of my homesickness.

Neither am I in truth so much sick for home as for you, for there are many pleasant things about this Northern life, now that I have come to understand it, which suit me well, so that I could be content to live here for a long time if only you were with me. The people are not so bad, except Lady Caroline and the Doctor (as they call the padre), which two I am convinced I shall never love ; but Mrs. Coffin is as a saint, and Percy is most noble. We have made vows to each other to stand by one another to the death, and we do even now suffer much for one another. I have written so of the family because my father desired it ; but tell him that I can never love the two whose good-will he did most desire me to cultivate, and Lady Caroline in especial is to me a terror. I am glad there is no one like to her in our family. As to other families here, I like best the Huntingtons who live in the great house in the park, where my father and you took me to walk before you brought me to the parsonage. You will remember that the family had not then come up from the city, and that the man at the lodge gave us permission to walk in the grounds. I know my father did not like the house, and that the walk gave him no pleasure ; but he would like the honorable family, for they have all been most kind to me. The oldest son is strong as an ox, and fat and lazy, but of good nature, and what they call here jolly. Then there is the little one, and the daughter of the house, the Senhorita Trix, who is altogether adorable. She can row and ride, and play tennis, and sing, and ride a bicycle, and whistle, and I shall teach her to shoot. She can do everything that a boy can do, yet is she pretty and ladylike ; and where she is there is pleasure for every one.

It is not so, as I wrote you at first, that these Northern people do not know how to amuse themselves ; for though

they do not have festas on the saints' days like ours, yet they have other most ingenious festivals. One was given last week at the Huntingtons'. It was a spectacle, something like our paseos, but not a procession, the figures being shown behind a frame like a picture. And here something astonishing happened. The Senhorita Trix wore a necklace, which at first I thought was your very own, for there was a great diamond sun, like that which was on the decoration given to my grandfather at Lisbon by the King of Portugal; and there were diamonds big as peas, like those which came from the mines in the South of Brazil, and which have been so long in our family. And I wondered if any one had stolen your necklace from you, and Mrs. Huntington had bought it; and I was so greatly troubled that I asked Mrs. Huntington, but she said that it could not be the same, for that this necklace was worthless, being of glass and not of diamonds.

Then I was comforted, for I liked not to think that you had lost your necklace. That same night also some wicked person did endeavor to steal the false necklace, but was frightened and did not achieve his purpose. Which attempt shows how fine an imitation it is, for that it was taken for a thing of value by others than myself. And now, my beloved Lady Mother, I kiss your hands, and also the hands of my most honorable Father. It seems to me a thousand years until you come for me again.

Your most obedient and ever loving son,
RODRIGUEZ JOAQUIM NEPOMUCENE MARIA DA SILVA.

Mr. da Souza read this letter with several pauses, during which he thought profoundly. His longest pause was on reaching that portion of the letter where the boy stated that his parents had taken him to the

Huntington place before bringing him to Mr. and Mrs. Coffin. Mr. da Souza was at a loss to account for this. Could it be to show him the house of the owner of the necklace, with a view to arranging a plot for stealing it? If so, this must have been after the time that the jewels were left in pawn with Mr. Huntington, and before the great ball in the city when they were stolen. It might have been that the Baron at first contemplated the idea of having his son steal the necklace from the country residence of the Huntingtons, and that this had determined his placing the boy in Little Wisdom. If so, the fact that the Baron and the Baroness had themselves effected the theft had rendered it unnecessary for them to confide their former plans in regard to it to their son. He evidently did not suspect his parents, and was no accomplice of theirs. If he had attempted to steal the necklace, it must have been entirely on his own account. As Mr. da Souza read on, even this seemed unlikely. The letter sounded perfectly genuine; and viewed from its light alone, he would have judged the boy innocent. It was the best evidence he had yet secured in his favor. Again, he was inclined to believe in Riggers. It would be interesting, however, to see how his guilty parents would reply to these searching questions. Would they admit their crime, or let slip some clew which would lead to their conviction? It was most important that he should see the answer to this letter, and indeed every letter that came to Riggers from his parents. Was it not a

strange thing that these guilty people should have left such a hostage in the power of the man whom they had injured? It seemed very stupid in them not to have removed Riggers from the vicinity of the Huntingtons after they had succeeded in possessing themselves of the necklace. They must have known that the law could track them through the boy. This aspect of the case seemed very mysterious to Mr. da Souza, and drew his attention for a time from the attempted robbery to the successful one. He had an interview with Mr. Huntington the next day, and asked his permission to trace the original crime.

Mr. Huntington thought that this was of no use. He had placed all the information in the hands of the law at the time of the theft, and had been assured that there was not the slightest chance of recovering the money advanced on the necklace, both on account of the difficulty of proving the crime and of apprehending the criminals.

Mr. da Souza explained that in the boy Riggers they had an easy means for overcoming the latter difficulty. He proposed sending word to the Da Silvas that their son had been seriously injured; and he trusted to their natural affection to bring one or both of them to Little Wisdom, and into the power of the law. Mr. Huntington consented to this stratagem, and Mr. da Souza despatched a cablegram purporting to be sent by Dr. Coffin, but of which that reverend gentleman knew nothing. He could only telegraph a part of the distance and in a very roundabout way.

It would be days before the parents could receive the summons, and weeks before they could arrive in Little Wisdom. Although Mr. Huntington had given Mr. da Souza permission to investigate the first theft of the necklace, he had little hope of any result from this stratagem; and he urged him in the mean time not to cease his efforts to ascertain who had entered his house the week before.

That question still remained unanswered in Mr. da Souza's mind. In spite of the evidence against Riggers, he was not convinced that he was the burglar; but if he was not, who was? Mr. da Souza determined to chat with Riggers on the subject. He thought that he could tell from his manner whether he was guilty, and could manage the conversation so adroitly that Riggers would not imagine himself suspected, or that Mr. da Souza had any interest in the burglary other than that of ordinary curiosity. In this he was perfectly successful. He was pleased to see that Riggers spoke unhesitatingly of everything that had occurred before he left the Huntington piazza at midnight. It was only when Mr. da Souza asked casually, "And what did you do after leaving the Huntingtons'?" that Riggers froze into obstinate silence. Mr. da Souza dropped that part of the investigation, and questioned him closely in regard to the man whom he had seen try the windows. Riggers persisted in his belief that it was Mr. Glitter. But when Mr. da Souza reported this to Mr. Huntington, he scouted the idea, and believed the story a

fiction of Riggers'. Mr. Glitter had left for New York before the robbery was attempted. Notwithstanding this definite information, Mr. da Souza thought best to write to a detective in New York to inform himself definitely in regard to Mr. Glitter, and to ascertain especially at what time he returned to the city.

Matters stood in this way when Trix gave her Ghost Party. Trix invited her guests to come prepared to tell some marvellous tale of the supernatural or else some harrowing murder story.

True to her first intention, she had brought Lady Caroline over in her pony-cart in the afternoon; and the old lady had been greatly flattered by her attention. Lady Caroline even went so far as to express a hollow-hearted sympathy in the fate of Billy, who had not yet thoroughly recovered from his injuries, and would always be blind of one eye. Billy was granted unusual privileges as an invalid, and roved at will about the place; but his spirit was broken. He no longer attacked or even snapped at any one. He was a changed dog; he had been thoroughly worsted, and all desire for fight had gone out of him. He had become an arrant coward, and at sight of Lady Caroline alighting in front of the house he rose from the door-mat and slunk into his kennel, with his tail between his legs.

"He seems to remember that he has been naughty to you once," Trix said, "and is afraid that you will punish him for it now that he is not able to defend himself."

Lady Caroline tripped into the house with her petticoats well about her. "I wouldn't trust him now," she said, "any nearer than a couple of rods. But I'm right down sorry he's had the courage beaten out of him. He can't be worth much as a watch-dog now. Maybe if you fed him high on raw liver and cayenne pepper, he'd chirk up a bit."

"Cayenne pepper?" Trix repeated doubtfully.

"Yes; that's what they give chickens when they have the pip or something. I should think what was good for one thing might be for another; and it seems as if, if his angry passions needed stimulating, blood and red pepper might do it."

Trix's other guests did not gather until evening. Then they all sat about the old fireplace, and toasted chocolate and ate nuts. Mrs. Huntington had sent to New Bedford for a barrel of driftwood, and from time to time bits of plank encrusted with a light green, mould-like substance were laid upon the coals and flamed into beauty. These pieces of driftwood had once formed the hulks of old whaling-vessels, and had been sheathed with copper plates which had corroded under the slow action of the salt water. They burned now with exquisite metallic colors, more subtle and quite as gorgeous as the most brilliant fireworks. They formed what Mrs. Huntington called color symphonies, beginning sometimes with malachite-green, shading into peacock-blue, melting into violet and heliotrope, and dying down into rose. Whatever the gamut of color, the harmony always

ended in rose; and this lovely tint lasted a long time, glowing in the rich coals until tiny forms of verdant flame flapped and flickered from freshly lighted sticks. In one of the little silences which followed an exceptionally beautiful display some one repeated Longfellow's "Fire of Driftwood," —

"Oft died the words upon our lips,
As suddenly, from out the fire
Built of the wreck of stranded ships,
The flames would leap and then expire.

"And as their splendor flashed and failed,
We thought of wrecks upon the main, —
Of ships dismantled, that were hailed
And sent no answer back again.

"Until they made themselves a part
Of fancies floating through the brain,
The long-lost ventures of the heart,
That send no answers back again."

Then the guests told their stories, — weird tales of the supernatural, but none so terrible as to frighten even little Jack, who delighted in this kind of make-believe bugaboo, and had himself rigged up a Jack-o'lantern in the shrubbery to startle the guests as they went home.

Mrs. Huntington was not of that class of realists who would abolish Santa Claus and the dear old nursery fairy-tales. She realized the value of the imaginative element, the wisdom of cultivating it within due bounds, and the pleasure which comes from its exercise. The stories, it was explicitly stated,

were fictitious; and it was requested that none should be related in which the mystery was not explained or a happy ending reached.

Mr. da Souza alone transgressed this rule by telling Poe's story of the Murder in the Rue Morgue.

Dr. Coffin next related a pleasanter incident which he had heard of a resident in an old New England mansion.¹ This gentleman, whom we will call Mr. Trueman, was in the habit of reading late, and of looking over the house, after all the rest of the family had retired, to see that all the doors were properly locked. One night while on his rounds he visited the cellar, and on the stairs he found an old letter, yellow and time-worn, written in faded ink, in a delicate girlish script. It was a love-letter, very sweetly and quaintly worded, with a dignity and reserve even in its warmest expressions which the maidens of to-day would do well to imitate. It began, "My deare friend Samuel," and ended, "Thy attached well-wisher, Dolly."

¹ The author first heard this story told by a charming raconteuse beside a glimmering fire in a fascinating studio in one of the oldest houses of Deerfield. She believed, when incorporating it in this story, that it had never appeared in print. Since then she has been told that a story evidently founded on the same incident has been published. She has searched widely to find it, in order to give due credit to the author, but has been unsuccessful; and she begs the unknown author's permission to allow this paraphrase to remain like a pressed flower within the leaves of her little book, though it has been unwittingly stolen from a neighbor's garden.

"The Strange Story of a Hand" is her own, and has previously appeared in a less abridged form in a magazine entitled "Two Tales."

Who was little Dolly? Why had she written him? The letter was dated "Cambridge, May 1, 1695." It was full of the sweetness of the May, but it carried with it too the antiquity of long ago. Had some one laid it on the step as a little trick? He asked all the family the next morning, but no one could explain its appearance. The next evening he examined the staircase again, and there was another letter. In this the little maid was not quite so shy. She addressed him, "My deare and faithfull Lover," and signed herself, "Thy promised bride."

Truly this was growing interesting. Still Mr. Trueman could not believe in the agency of the supernatural, and he determined to probe the mystery to its core. When the servants were ready to go to their rooms for the night, he went to the kitchen, and with them examined the cellar stairs. There was no letter there. The servants went upstairs; and Mr. Trueman sat down at the kitchen table with his newspaper, to await developments.

The bulkhead cellar door leading to the open air was securely padlocked; he had previously examined the cellar, and convinced himself that there was no one secreted there; and the door leading from the kitchen to the cellar stairs was open and opposite him. No one could gain access to the stairs without being seen or heard by him. The kitchen clock ticked noisily on, but all other noises were hushed. Nothing happened; evidently he had taken his precautions too strictly. There was no opportunity for

jugglery of any kind, and of course there would be no manifestation.

The clock struck twelve, and Mr. Trueman took up his lamp, convinced that nothing had happened; but before he left the room he closed the cellar door, and was astonished to see another letter lying on the stair. Silently, without his knowledge, though in his very presence, some invisible messenger had placed it there, and another missive from his ghostly correspondent had fallen at his feet from the distance of nearly two centuries.

In this letter the unknown lady reproached her Samuel for not answering her letters, and begged him to come to her. The letter closed with a quotation from an anthem frequently sung in the churches of that period, —

“Come, my beloved, haste away,
Cut short the hours of thy delay,
Fly like the bounding hart or roe
Over the hills where the spices grow.”

There was something eerie in this call to the spirit-land, which might have affected the mind of a man less firm of nerve than Mr. Trueman. But while the mystery excited his imagination, it in no way troubled him, and he set himself to watch another night with renewed vigilance. As soon as the servants announced themselves ready to leave the kitchen, he took his seat this time upon the cellar stairs with a lamp beside him. Their heavy tread as they went to their rooms resounded and shook the creaking stair-

case, which mounted to the rear of the house over his head. At the same instant he felt a light tap on his forehead, and another letter glided into his lap. Involuntarily he looked up, almost expecting to see the spirit hand which had dropped the letter, or at least the vanishing flutter of a white robe. But nothing of the kind met his gaze. Instead, he discovered high up under the upper staircase a little shelf, and on the shelf a packet of old letters. Mice had nibbled the faded lutestring ribbon which originally bound them together; and the jar of the shelf occasioned by the servants mounting the staircase above it each evening was just enough to shake down one letter.

The mystery was explained.

Mrs. Courtney, the artist who had arranged the tableaux at the Portrait Party, related a rather gruesome experience which she said had happened to a friend of hers, but which some in the company remembered to have read in a published form.

Carryl Carlton, the hero of the story, was a young American artist who had a studio in a quaint old house in the Latin quarter in Paris. There was a restaurant in the lower story of the house kept by a Madame Bonvin, who had a pretty niece, named Clochette, who sometimes posed for the young artist.

Clochette played the guitar too; and Carryl Carlton painted her costumed in Spanish fashion, and called the picture "A Souvenir of Seville." He never quite finished the picture, for Clochette played while

she sat; the little hand was never still long enough for him to paint it. Madame Bonvin at length grew dissatisfied; she fancied that the artist would care more for Clochette if he found that he could not have her sit for him whenever he wished for her, and Clochette disappeared.

Carryl Carlton could not prevail on the old woman to tell him what had become of Clochette, for she could see that he was not seriously interested in her. After a time he tried to forget her in the society of a young American lady then in Paris. One day a student of the Medical School visited Carryl Carlton's studio, and was much pleased by his "Souvenir of Seville." He agreed to purchase it if the artist would finish the hand; and a little later the Medical Student found in the dissecting-room of the Medical School a hand so beautiful that he determined to send it to the artist with the request that he would copy it in his picture for him. The Medical Student placed this hand in a tin box, and left it with Madame Bonvin for the artist.

Madame Bonvin had a great deal of curiosity, and she peeped inside the box and read the accompanying letter. The hand looked to her like Clochette's, and a little shudder ran down the old lady's spine; but she replaced the lid, and gave the box to the artist. Carlton placed the hand over the strings of the guitar, and painted upon his picture for some time before the resemblance struck him. That night he dreamed of Clochette, and woke suddenly. The moon shone

through the window, and he could see the guitar upon the chair. But what was that white object flitting back and forth above it, while Clochette's favorite air breathed through the room? He sprang to his feet and lighted the gas. The hand lay perfectly quiet. There was a white ribbon tied to the guitar, which the wind might have fluttered across the strings; but he could not be sure that the hand itself had not created the notes which he had heard. He listened, and it seemed to him that one string still vibrated faintly.

The next morning, as he walked in the open air, he threw off these morbid fancies and purchased some roses, American Beauties, for the lady of whom they seemed a namesake. He ran upstairs before breakfasting, and placed them in a vase of water. When he re-entered the room, he found the vase overturned, — the water dripping to the floor, the box in which he had shut the hand upset, and the hand itself grasping the roses so tightly that the clinched nails had pierced the buds and were dyed crimson. Then other pranks were played, until at last Carlton was convinced that Clochette was dead, and that this was her hand. He realized, too, that he loved Clochette, now that it was too late. He sought the Medical Student; but the young man could give him no information in regard to the owner of the hand. He returned to his studio, determined to take the hand to a little Ursuline burying-ground in the suburbs of Paris, and there commit it to consecrated earth. But what was

his surprise on entering the door to see Clochette, the real Clochette, seated on his model-stand playing the guitar? The young artist never quite understood the mystery, or guessed that Madame Bonvin had entered his studio in his absence, and had bent the fingers over the roses to attract his attention to the absent Clochette and waken his slumbering affection.

In these two stories the seemingly supernatural had been explained, and everything had ended pleasantly. The guests took their leave, all but Lady Caroline, who remained sitting in the chimney-corner. Dr. Coffin spoke to her, as he drew his wife's hand within his arm.

"Presently," she replied; "I will come with Percy;" and Riggers asked the Doctor if he also might remain and help Percy bring Lady Caroline home. When the bustle occasioned by the leave-taking had subsided, and little Jack had gone to bed, Trix struck up an old, weird melody, "The Mistletoe Bough." She sang it without accompaniment, sitting far back in the darkened room; for the flames had flickered down, and the embers were dying into ashes.

"The Baron's retainers were blithe and gay,
And keeping their Christmas holiday;
The Baron beheld with a father's pride
His beautiful child, young Lovell's bride,
While she with her bright eyes seemed to be
The star of that goodly company.

Oh the mistletoe bough! Oh the mistletoe bough!

“ ‘I ’m weary of dancing now,’ she cried ;
‘ Here tarry a moment, — I ’ll hide, I ’ll hide !
And, Lovell, be sure thou ’rt the first to trace
The clew to my secret lurking-place.’
Away she ran, and her friends began
Each tower to search, and each nook to scan ;
And young Lovell cried, ‘ Oh, where dost thou hide ?
I ’m lonesome without thee, my own dear bride.’
Oh the mistletoe bough !

“ They sought her that night, and they sought her next day,
And they sought her in vain, when a week passed away !
In the highest, the lowest, the loneliest spot,
Young Lovell sought wildly, but found her not.
And years flew by ; and their grief at last
Was told as a sorrowful tale of the past ;
And when Lovell appeared the children cried,
‘ See, the old man weeps for his fairy bride !’
Oh the mistletoe bough !

“ At length an old chest, that had long lain hid,
Was found in the castle, — they raised the lid,
And a skeleton form lay mould’ring there,
In the bridal wreath of the lady fair !
Oh, sad was her fate ! In sportive jest
She hid from her lord in the old oak chest.
It closed with a spring ; and her bridal bloom
Lay withering there in a living tomb.
Oh the mistletoe bough ! ”

There was a sympathetic thrill in Trix’s voice which was very winsome. Percy and Riggers both felt it, and edged a little nearer to her.

“ They say,” said Mrs. Huntington, “ that the old mansion which stood upon the site which this house

now occupies, and which was burned before we came here, was a haunted house. The servants tell me that Colonel Pride, the former owner, was murdered in the library in the wing; that for many years thereafter his wife lived here, all alone,—for no servants would stay long with her, for the house was certainly haunted by a ghost which walked its veranda at night, and peered into the windows, especially into the one that opened into the room where the murder had been committed. Somewhere there must be a natural explanation for this phenomenon. I wish we might know what it is.”

“The story is false,” Lady Caroline cried, strangely excited, “or rather it is partly an old slander and partly, as you say, explainable; and painful as the subject is to me, for the sake of the slandered man I will tell the truth.”

All drew closer to the dying fire and to Lady Caroline, sitting bolt upright by the old chimney, the monument and last relic of the old Pride Mansion. In the dusk her wrinkles, the parting of her scanty locks which had widened almost to baldness, the stringiness of the gray curls worn *à la* Mrs. Browning, and all the other marks of age were disguised; one saw only the erect stateliness of her figure, which had helped to give her the name of “Lady” In her excitement her voice took a clear ring, and she expressed herself without many of the provincialisms into which she fell in ordinary conversation.

“Old Colonel Pride invested heavily in land where

the new town of Great Folly now stands. He was sure that the springs would make it a great resort some day, and he got up a stock company, and induced a great many people to invest who could ill afford to lose their money. He had a map drawn with streets and corner-lots pretty much as they are to-day, though there were only stakes driven in the ground at the corners then. He seemed to have a sort of prophetic instinct; only it swept clean out of sight of the people of those times. It was only a paper town; but it had its name, though it was none of Colonel Pride's giving. Pride's Folly they called it then; and the Folly part has stuck to it still, though the town has forgotten, or more likely never heard of, its founder. It was a bubble, and it burst, and it broke Colonel Pride's heart with it. I have cause to remember the night that he died. There had been a little company here at the Pride Mansion; but they had gone away early, for the Colonel did not meet with them. He was closeted in his library over his account-books and letters. My brother and I waited until after the other guests had gone, to take Mary Percy home with us. But Mary was sitting with Arthur Pride under the rose-trellis, and they were quite oblivious of the lateness of the hour. My brother grew impatient. At length he said: 'If she prefers Arthur Pride's company, she may have it;' and we started for the road, when suddenly we heard a pistol-shot fired in the library, and we ran back to the house. The library window

was open, and my brother reached it first, and stood looking in, apparently aghast at what he saw, when Mary Percy darted from under the rose-trellis and stood by his side. She shrieked aloud, 'Arthur, Arthur, you have killed your father!' and fainted in my arms as I came up. The light streamed from the curtainless window, as I caught her, and I saw Colonel Pride fallen forward upon his writing-table from his armchair, bleeding from a wound in the temple, and Arthur standing over him in a dazed way holding a pistol. Almost by magic a number of people had collected; the servants of the family, and a guest or two who had not really left the grounds, but were attracted by the pistol-shot. As soon as we recovered our senses, my brother and I hurried Mary Percy away. He carried her in his arms, and she did not come out of her faint until we had reached her home, and then it was only to go into convulsions. Arthur Pride was arrested, and held for the murder of his father. The principal evidence against him was Mary Percy's cry, which the servants had heard as they hurried to the room; but Mary herself was unable to testify, for she was lying at the point of death with brain-fever. This very circumstance told against Arthur Pride, and every one believed that he had killed his father in a quarrel about Mary Percy. Arthur Pride's own behavior added to this popular opinion. He knew that the evidence was against him, and before the time for the trial he broke jail and fled the country.

“When my brother heard of this, such a look of triumph came into his face that I knew that he loved Mary Percy and believed that now she would be his. I had nursed her through her illness. She was doing well when we told her that Arthur Pride had fled; but after that she had a relapse, and the doctor said he could n’t do anything for her. She could have borne losing him, but she could not bear the thought that he was a murderer. My brother came to see her every day. He never said a word about his love; but she knew it, for he looked at her with great devouring eyes which made her droop her own.

“ ‘Mary!’ he said passionately one day right before me, ‘I know what is killing you, and you shall not die. Arthur Pride did not kill his father. When I reached the window just after the pistol-shot was fired, the Colonel was alone. He had killed himself. His son burst into the room an instant later, and snatched the pistol from his hand. I saw this. I would have testified so in court if it had come to trial. I will publish it in the papers now. Perhaps Arthur Pride will see my statement and come back.’ ”

My brother said this in a choking voice, and I knew that it was death to him; but Mary Percy brightened up from that day, and recovered slowly.

When Colonel Pride’s affairs were investigated, it was seen that he was a bankrupt, and had contemplated suicide; but although my brother’s statement was published, Arthur Pride never came back. Perhaps he went so far away that he never saw the

papers. Perhaps he, too, committed suicide, or something happened to him. His mother believed that he was dead, or he would have come again or at least have sent her money. But he did not know when he went away that his father had died a bankrupt. He must have thought that she was well provided for, for the rest of her days. Madam Pride lived for years in the old mansion, — the creditors let her stay there and did n't touch the furniture, — and she had a little property come to her from her brother, enough to keep her. That was true about the servants, though. No one would stay with her; for a woman in white did walk the verandas and peer into the library window.

“Madam Pride saw the ghost herself one night, and she got my brother to come and sit up all night in the library.

“He did n't believe in ghosts. I think he had a notion that it might be Arthur Pride who was hiding in the neighborhood. He sat there in the darkened room in Colonel Pride's armchair. The window was a great white sheet of moonlight; and as he sat and watched, he heard a soft footstep, and there was Mary Percy, with her forehead pressed against the pane. He went to her, and saw that she was fast asleep. She had recovered, to all appearances, from that great shock; in her waking moments she seemed quite herself; but she had become a somnambulist, and every now and then she walked in her sleep straight to the old Pride mansion, and tried to look again at that

dreadful sight in the library. My brother snatched a cloak that was lying on a chair, wrapped it about her gently, for he did not dare rudely to waken her. He followed her home, and told her mother where he had found her. After this, they locked her within her room at night; and after a time she seemed to have lost the habit, though it returned at rare intervals whenever she was strongly excited. But it was not until years after, — until Madam Pride had died, and the old mansion had burned to the ground, and until all hope of Arthur Pride ever returning or being yet alive had died out of her heart, — that she consented to marry my brother."

"So my mother was Mary Percy?" Percy asked.

"Yes, dear. I don't think I quite realized that you were sitting there listening to this story; but I don't know that there is any harm in your knowing. And we must never let the old slander against Arthur Pride stand uncontradicted."

"I shall be all the more tender of my mother, now that I know what she has suffered," Percy replied proudly.

"And I think you ought to be proud of your father," said Trix. "No one but he knew to a certainty that Arthur Pride was not a murderer, and yet he 'forbore his own advantage,' and did his best to reinstate his rival. I think that was noble."

"It runs in the blood," said Lady Caroline, proudly. "No Coffin will let another suffer unjustly for his sake."

Percy shrank into himself with a deep sense of shame. He was glad that by the firelight they could not see his crimsoning cheeks. He felt very mean and little as Riggers patted him softly on the knee, saying, "Zat ees as I sink. Percy also is one — what you call it? — one — one —"

"Hero," said Trix.

But Percy ground his teeth, and muttered to himself, "Coward! coward!"

CHAPTER VII.

GRAVE AND GAY.

BY THE PRIDE TOMB, AND A CANOE-TRIP.

A DAY or two after the Ghost Party, Mr. da Souza received a letter from a brother detective in New York, which set him puzzling upon another phase of the problem. His friend wrote that a great deal was known about Mr. Glitter; detectives were searching for him with charges of fraud in the buying and selling of gems. He had been expected in New York on the night of the Portrait Party, for it had been ascertained that he had written from Great Folly, taking passage on a steamer which sailed for England the next day; but he must have been informed that officers were on the lookout for him, for every train coming into the city on that night and the next day had been searched, and the detectives were certain that he had not entered the city in that way, while the steamer had sailed without him.

Mr. da Souza pondered for some time after the receipt of this letter. Mike had testified that Mr. Glitter had taken the owl-train after the Portrait Party. At one of its stops before arriving at New York, Mr. Glitter must have left the train. Mr. da

Souza determined to have a conversation with the conductor of the owl-train before beginning investigations at any of the intermediate stations.

He found this official at Great Folly, and to his surprise the conductor remembered distinctly the occurrences of the night in question. The owl-train was an express, and only stopped at Little Wisdom when flagged by a New York passenger. On this particular night the owl was behind time, and the conductor was vexed at being obliged to stop. A gentleman in a light overcoat carrying a Gladstone bag had mounted the car-steps; but when the conductor had swung his lantern to the engineer and had himself entered the car, the new passenger was not to be found. He had been not a little astonished by this, and had gone through the cars several times, but was confident that the man was not on board. The conclusion which he had arrived at was that the passenger had forgotten something, and jumped off the platform on the other side of the train. The owl had made but one other stop before reaching New York, and this was at Bridgewater. The conductor was confident that no one had left the train here; but a detective had got on at this place, and had gone through the train, very carefully examining the faces of all the passengers and comparing them with a photograph. These two unusual and mysterious circumstances had impressed the date of this evening upon his mind.

Mr. da Souza had now secured important data.

Mr. Glitter was a rogue, and he had not gone to New York on the train on which he was supposed to have left. He might therefore have been the man who attempted to steal the necklace. Against this hypothesis was the fact that Mr. Glitter was an expert lapidary, and must have known that the necklace was not worth stealing. Grandmother Huntington had not been able to give any description which could help him. She could not even tell whether the burglar was tall or short,—a most important detail. Mr. Huntington, who caught a glimpse of the man just as his mother was pushing him down the stairs, thought that he was undersized, almost a boy; but Mr. da Souza reflected that this might be because he was standing a step lower than Grandmother Huntington. Still, this was a bit of evidence which made him consider carefully the supposition that Riggers might have attempted the theft.

An answer to the letter which Riggers had sent his mother would have been desirable; but this he could hardly hope to secure, as the cablegram which Mr. da Souza had sent, giving the false news of an accident to Riggers would probably reach the Baron and the Baroness before the letter which mentioned the necklace. It was desirable that it should do so if they were to be tolled back, as the news of the new excitement in regard to the necklace, if received in time, might alarm them and prevent their coming.

Mr. da Souza wondered if Riggers' seemingly innocent letter could have been prearranged with his

parents, and cover some information which was not apparent to the uninitiated. He dismissed this hypothesis, however, after short consideration. The success of the first robbery precluded all idea that this attempt was instigated by the elder Da Silvas. If the boy had undertaken the burglary, he had done so entirely on his own account. The only way to prove his innocence or guilt was to ascertain where he had been after leaving Mr. Huntington on the night of the Portrait Party. Mr. da Souza saw that Riggers was attached to Mrs. Coffin, and determined to enlist her aid. If the boy would confide in any one, he certainly would in her. Mrs. Coffin did not like the task; but it seemed to be a duty, and she hoped that it would result in Riggers' vindication.

The day after the Ghost Party Riggers had studied his lessons as usual in the morning, but he had bolted his dinner with unusual rapidity, and had disappeared immediately afterward. Mrs. Coffin was disappointed, for she had intended to ask him to take a walk with her in order to have an opportunity for confidential conversation. She had planned to visit the graveyard on the hill, to set out some plants on her mother's grave, and to see that the Pride tomb was in good repair. There was no one else left to take an interest in it in Little Wisdom. It was not a very cheerful excursion for a young boy; but all deaths for which she sorrowed had happened so long ago that Mrs. Coffin felt no poignant grief in visiting the cemetery. It was a pleasant spot in the late summer, and sug-

gested quiet reflection and tender musings. She knew that Riggers would be glad if asked to carry her basket of roots for her, and it was with a feeling of disappointment that she took it up and set out upon her walk alone.

She had not been in the cemetery for a year, and she was struck on entering the gate by several changes. In the first place it was more populous than last year. Death had not entered her own family recently, but these thickening graves meant heartbreak for many of her friends. A pathetic poem by the young poet, Lorimer Stoddard, came to her mind :—

THE GARDEN.

Under the gloom of the shivering pines,
That whisper when it blows,
Behind the creeper-covered wall
Is a garden that always grows.

In summer and in spring time,
And when the winter snows
Bend the dark branches to the ground,
The garden always grows.

The hand of man has made it;
The white stones stand in rows;
The tears of the world have watered it,
And the garden always grows.

Having set out her plants, and kissed the slab above her mother's grave, Mrs. Coffin wandered down the path to the Pride tomb, the only one in the village

cemetery. It was a dismal structure in the heavy Egyptian style, with an overturned torch carved over the door. Ordinarily the path was choked with weeds, it was in the most secluded part of the grounds, and she fancied that no one ever came here ; but she was surprised, as she approached, to see a man seated on the broad step reading. He rose instantly, placed his book in his pocket, and pulling his hat down over his face, seized a crutch and a cane which were leaning against the tomb, and limped away toward the upper part of the cemetery, forcing himself through a gap in the hedge. Mrs. Coffin saw at once that he was a stranger in Little Wisdom, and she fancied at first that he might be some one from the neighboring railroad-station who was whiling away the interval between trains by a visit of curiosity to the cemetery. He had evidently chosen the door-sill of the Pride tomb as a seat simply because it was secluded and sunny. A half-burned cigar lay on the step ; and while she noticed this fact she saw a number of other cigar-stumps of like size. Apparently the stranger was not a casual visitor, but made this an habitual resort. He could not live far away ; for he dragged himself painfully, and a long walk was evidently beyond his power. Mrs. Coffin's idle surmises in regard to the stranger were suddenly dismissed as she noticed a comparatively new brass plate upon the door of the tomb. It simply chronicled the date of the death of Mrs. Pride ; but that poor lady had been dead twenty years, and the creditors of

the Pride estate, who had possessed themselves of all the property which she had left, had not seen fit to expend any money in a tablet to her memory. This plate had been affixed to the door of the tomb within a year. Who could have done it? Surprises were not to end here. Mrs. Coffin presently heard a rushing sound on the hillside back of the burying-ground, followed by a dull thud in the little ravine at her feet. Looking up, she saw a boy, whom she presently recognized as Riggers, rolling pumpkins down the steep hill. They had evidently grown in a little field adjoining Mrs. Harrigan's cabin, on the door-step of which residence stood the strange lame gentleman. He paused a moment to view the work of destruction and then went into the cabin, and evidently spoke to Mrs. Harrigan; for she sallied out immediately with a broom, and rushed toward Riggers, shrieking her anathemas. Riggers capered in front of her, keeping just out of the way of her broom, and grimacing in the most tantalizing manner. He approached the burying-ground; but as he was running backward, he did not discover Mrs. Coffin until he had vaulted over the hedge.

"Rodriguez!" she exclaimed, "what does this mean?" The boy colored to the roots of his hair, but was silent. Mrs. Harrigan came puffing up, and poured forth a tirade voluble enough, but so incoherent that Mrs. Coffin could only infer that she demanded payment for the pumpkins which lay at the foot of the hill in a shattered and ruined condition.

"Most certainly you shall be paid for this outrage," Mrs. Coffin replied. "Rodriguez, why have you so maliciously destroyed this poor woman's property?"

"She knows," Riggers replied doggedly.

Mrs. Harrigan winced. "It was a fair game," she replied; "and if young gentlemen will play cards, they must make up their minds to take what luck comes."

Riggers turned pale with rage. "*I neffer played cards wiz you, and you better be careful how you talken. You are one wicked woman. If I had my gun, I kill you.*"

Mrs. Harrigan cowered and retired to her house, muttering as she went.

"Stop!" called Mrs. Coffin, "explain what you mean;" but Mrs. Harrigan had evidently repented her imprudence, and refused to return.

"What is she talking about, Rodriguez?" Mrs. Coffin asked, turning to the boy; "and why did you do such a cruel, wicked thing as to destroy all her pumpkins?"

Riggers chose to ignore the first question, and to answer only the second one. "Because she was so mean, so mean to Trix and little Jack. Zey ask her for one leetle pumpkin to make a — what you call — a Jack-lantern, for ze park for ze party of ghosts, and she will not, she is so mean, — not one leetle miserable pumpkin, which sall be worth the half of one cent. When Trix tell me of zat, my blood boil, — I am mad. I tell her I will revenge, I will destroy all

her pumpkins, I will not leave one, not one. Zen maybe next time she will be more polite."

"You were very wrong, 'Riguez, very wrong," Mrs. Coffin said gently; but the words had a caressing sound, almost as if she were pitying him instead of blaming him, for Mrs. Coffin was thinking how strangely the boy looked like Arthur Pride. She recalled the fits of passion in which the boy friend of her girlhood sometimes indulged, and it seemed almost as if thirty years had rolled away and he stood before her once again. She laid her hand on Riggers' dark hair, and looked into his troubled eyes. "You will be sorry for this to-morrow, 'Riguez. It was very provoking in the old woman to refuse Trix and little Jack their request; but you have done them no good by your revenge, and she is a poor inoffensive old creature, who does no one any harm and who can ill afford the loss of all her pumpkins."

"Zat is not true," Riggers insisted. "She make much harm, much harm; she is one wicked woman."

"How do you know that? And, 'Riguez, what did she mean about playing cards?"

"I do not know;" but the boy could not meet Mrs. Coffin's clear eyes, and the lady knew that he was not telling the truth. She was inexpressibly pained, for she was fond of Riggers and had believed in him. Was it possible that she had been mistaken in the boy. She stood looking at him, greatly troubled and perplexed. "'Riguez," she said at last, "I wanted to talk with you this afternoon. I am your true, true

friend, I beg you to believe it, and I fear that you are in trouble. I can help you if you will confide in me, but I can do nothing if you shut me out of your confidence. I have heard ugly rumors about Mrs. Harrigan and her son. You have never gambled with him, have you?"

"Neffter. Oh, believe me, neffer!"

It was impossible not to believe the boy now; and Mrs. Coffin went on: "I am glad of that, for it would pain me almost as much as if Percy had done it." Riggers' eyes drooped again. "You are almost like my own son, 'Riguez. I love you for your own sake and because you remind me of a playmate I had long ago. Now tell me, dear,—and I have a good reason for asking,—where you were after midnight on the night of the Portrait Party."

Riggers shook his head.

"Percy says you were serenading Amy Heywood. Is that true?"

Riggers did not reply.

"Listen, my boy, and I will tell you frankly the reason why I ask. It is not because I wish to pry into your concerns, but because unless you can tell where you were at that time you will find yourself in very serious trouble. I cannot understand why you will not tell me what I wish to know, unless you were doing something wrong; and even if that is the case it is better to own up what is certain to be found out. My dear boy, if you are implicated in what you are suspected of having done, you will know what I

mean, and will understand that it is impossible for you to hide your wrong-doing any longer. But, oh, I do so hope that it is not so bad as that; and that whatever the fault you may have to confess, it will prove you innocent of this other crime."

Still Riggers did not understand to what she referred. It did not occur to him that he could be suspected of having taken part in a burglary. He knew only that some great vague trouble was hanging over him,—some dark cloud which was bringing unknown evil, and which he could not avert without disloyalty to his friend.

He gave a bitter cry, and threw himself upon the ground. It was strange that he happened to be standing in front of the Pride tomb, and his fingers clutched and tore at the grass which grew at its side.

"Mother, mother!" he cried, in Portuguese. "Oh, why did you ever leave me in this land of strangers, where there is no one of my own to whom I can turn in my trouble?"

Mrs. Coffin could not understand the words; but she comprehended the desolation that was in the boy's heart, and she sat down on the step beside him. At the same time the thought struck her that a stranger seeing them in this position would have thought that the youth was overcome with despair for the death of some dear one in that gloomy tomb. The Prides might indeed have been glad of such a scion,—those lonely Prides, left with none to carry on their line, upon the earth, of whom the overturned torch over

the door of the tomb was a fit emblem, for their light had gone out.

She pitied the dead Prides and the living boy ; but her pity for the Prides was only a sentiment, while her sympathy for the suffering lad was as vital as his own agony. "If Percy had gone wrong," she kept saying to herself, "I would be so grateful to any one who would help him."

"Trust in me, 'Riguez," she said, as he grew more quiet ; "tell me everything."

But the boy rose proudly. "You do not know me," he said with flashing eyes. "You do not know of what blood I come ; it is not of ze race of ze gambler, of ze thief ;" and with these bitter words he flung back her offered help, and walked rapidly down the hill toward Little Wisdom. Mrs. Coffin stood leaning against the Pride tomb. A sickening possibility had come to her. Was it possible that Riggers had lost money in play, and had been driven to robbery to pay his gambling debts and avoid detection ? She felt that this was only a suspicion, that she had no right to breathe it to any one without more confirming evidence ; but it poisoned her confidence in Riggers. Worse than this, she could no longer look upon his friendship with Percy with satisfaction. Might he not lead Percy astray ? It was all very well to pity and love the erring, but we must also protect the innocent ; and she deeply regretted that Riggers had ever come into their house. It would be her aim henceforward to keep the boys apart as much as

possible. How rigorously she quarantined Riggers on his first arrival, fearing that he had been exposed to yellow fever and might spread the infection! Was not moral taint infinitely more contagious and deadly in its effect? The little room which Riggers had occupied in that first quarantine opened from the attic under the hipped roof. It was in order; and without a word of explanation, on her return from the cemetery Mrs. Coffin removed her son's effects to it. "I think it is better for you to have a room to yourself," was all she said to Percy, who grumbled at the change.

Riggers said not a word; but he looked at her with a comprehending, beseeching gaze which was very hard for Mrs. Coffin to bear. He understood that from henceforth he was under a ban, to be suspected and avoided.

He could have borne it if Percy had appreciated his trouble and had been sympathetic and grateful; but a jealousy had sprung up between the two boys for Trix's good graces, which rendered Percy blind and even indifferent to his friend's suffering.

There was to be a Leap-year canoe-trip. The canoes belonged to a club at Great Folly of which Mr. Huntington was a member. Trix had proposed to Amy Heywood and several girl friends that they should provide themselves with baskets of edibles, and each invite a boy of their acquaintance to paddle her canoe to an island up the river much resorted to by picnic-parties; and after a supper together they would all float down again by moonlight.

Amy Heywood had entered into this plan with enthusiasm, and her brother Bricktop had agreed to convey the party to the Great Folly boat-house and back again in the family hay-wagon.

These hay-rides were a feature of Little Wisdom merrymaking. The great farm-wagon was widened by racks projecting far over the sides, and then piled with fresh, fragrant hay. In such a wagon as many as sixteen young people could be stowed, to say nothing of wraps, baskets, tin horns, and a ladder for mounting and descending, from which swung a lighted lantern. Bricktop usually drove standing, guiding the four powerful horses in a really masterly manner, — no small task; for the Heywood horses were always in good condition, and were frequently as excited by the rollicking songs as the young people themselves.

On this particular occasion Trix had hesitated as to whether she should make Percy or Riggers her escort. She had finally decided upon Riggers, for several reasons.

First, because he looked younger and more boyish than Percy. He was fully two inches shorter than Trix, and she had a more patronizing and familiar manner with him on that very account. Percy was beginning to put on the young gentleman, and Trix preferred to receive attentions from him rather than bestow them upon him.

Secondly, Riggers was not likely to be invited by any of the other girls, while Percy was a general

favorite. Trix pitied the lonely boy, so far from his own home and friends, who had had to wrestle, too, with the difficulties of acquiring a strange language, and was diffident about making mistakes before comparative strangers. If one of the other girls had chanced to invite him, Riggers would not have dared to speak to her during the entire trip.

Riggers would be made supremely happy by being chosen; he would have been equally depressed if he had been left out; while Percy, she felt sure, would not have cared in either event.

In this, however, Trix was mistaken. Percy did care. His self-love was deeply wounded that Trix should have preferred "that little Brazilian monkey" to himself. On the day before the excursion he met Humphrey Huntington at the post-office, radiant because he had just received an invitation from Amy Heywood; and Percy was obliged to admit that as yet he had not been asked by any one.

"It appears to me," said Humphrey, "that *vous n'êtes pas là-dedans*."

"I suppose that is your very witty way of implying that I am not in it," Percy replied crossly.

"That is an opinion which does not seem to need much upholstering," Humphrey replied carelessly.

"Hunx, Hunx, what *do* you mean?"

"I suppose I was thinking of bolstering up a theory and of upholding it, and sort of mixed the two," Humphrey replied; and in spite of his ill-humor Percy laughed heartily.

"You are the greatest one for mixing things," he replied; "you are worse than Mrs. Malaprop. Was it you or she who said that hay-rides were bad things for young people, because the night air is so hilarious?"

"Now quit that, Percy! I tell you I won't be spoken of in such a desultory manner."

"There you go again. Do you mean derogatory or insulting?"

"Both, or I would n't have condensed them. Can't you see there's a method in my madness? I get the force of two words into one."

"Well, I don't care how great a mess you get into in the way of language so long as I am invited on this hay-ride and boat-trip. It looks now unpleasantly enough as if I were to be left out."

"Perhaps one of the Stebbins girls will ask you. They say deacons' daughters have a friendly feeling for ministers' sons."

"No, Amandâ — that's the school-teacher — has invited Bricktop. I can see her now sitting up beside him on the driver's seat, monarch of all she surveys. She'll forget, and fancy she's at the Turnip Hollow school-desk, and rap us all to order. Bricktop would rather have had the pretty one, but she has asked Mr. da Souza. So there I am out again."

"Worse luck. I don't see what Trix was thinking of not to invite you herself."

"Nor I. But she's welcome to her choice; and if I don't have a chance to go, I rather think I can stand it."

“Va mouche, ne me dérangez-pas,” sang a merry voice behind the boys. It was Trix herself, who had thus translated the familiar “Shoo, fly, don’t bother me.”

“I’ve an invitation for you, Percy,” she said, quite out of breath, for she had been pursuing the boys for quite a distance. “Mrs. Courtney wants to know if she may have the pleasure of your company on the canoe-trip?”

“Mrs. Courtney! Why did n’t you pair me off with Aunt Caroline or your grandmother?”

“You may consider yourself fortunate if you have as entertaining a companion as Lady Caroline; and as for Grandmother Huntington, she is far too ambitious to content herself with such small fry as you. She told me this morning that if she had owned that diamond necklace in her youth, she might have attracted the notice of the Earl of Chatham.”

All laughed. Grandmother Huntington’s frivolities were a standing joke; and Trix went on to explain that as Mrs. Courtney had been asked to chaperon the party, the girls had abstained from inviting Percy, in order to give Mrs. Courtney a companion whom she would enjoy.

“There’s a compliment for you,” said Humphrey. “Fancy Mrs. Courtney booked to take me, and I entertaining her with my double understanders, as the French say. She would be saying to me, as the dense Harvard student did to the sarcastic girl, ‘Did you say that in earnest, or was it only in *repertoire*?’”

"Oh, Hunx," Trix exclaimed, "as the English girl said of the Alhambra, 'you are quite too far more than most awfully delicious,' whenever you try to talk, as Deacon Stebbins describes it, 'paregorically.' As he said in prayer-meeting of the Scriptures, a great deal of your conversation cannot be taken in a literary sense."

But Percy was not entirely appeased; he persisted in believing that Trix had preferred Riggers' society to his own, and the slight rankled.

As for Riggers, that evening was the last happy one for a long time. He was Trix's devoted knight, and it was joy to be near her. He had confided to Percy, earlier in the summer that he knew it was absurd, and that Trix would probably be married before he was out of knickerbockers, but all the same he would gladly die for Trix Huntington. How delightful it was, as the lumbering farm-wagon jolted down the road, to sit beside her, and to have all the other boys and girls know that this was not his choice alone, but that she had chosen him! Merrily the young voices rang out in their favorite comic songs, "Killaloo," "The Owl and the Pussy Cat," and the ever-perennial "Walloping Window-blind." Percy sang "The Drum Major;" all joining in the chorus, "It must be Schneider leads dot band." Jokes and hilarity, noise and confusion, prevailed. Some one tried to start a sentimental song, but was promptly hooted down and drowned out by the others striking up "Odd Fellows Hall." The time for Juanita and

the Eton Boat-Song came later, when, having reached the boat-house, the hay-wagon was left, and each couple, ensconced in their separate canoe, glided up the river in that sociable solitude which is so much enjoyed by young people of congenial tastes and common interests.

"Ees not this nice?" Riggers asked, as he dipped the paddle into the sunset-flushed water. "I am charming that you chose me. It was very luffing of you."

Trix smiled. She knew that Riggers meant to say that it was *lovely* of her, and that he was charmed, but she would not hurt his feelings by letting him know that he had made a mistake; and she nestled luxuriously back into the cushions in the stern, and replied, as she played with the tiller-ropes, —

"Yes, indeed, nice is no name for it. As the Adirondack guide-book expresses it, 'It is simply too supremely effulgent with glorious beauty to seem otherwise than a delightful but delusive dream.'"

Riggers listened gravely; this sounded like very beautiful language to him, and he took it all in sober earnest. As they rounded a point, they saw the hill on which Mrs. Harrigan's house stood; and Trix exclaimed, "Was n't she just too mean for anything not to let Jack and me have one little miserable pumpkin for our lantern? I went and helped myself all the same, and I should just like to pay her up."

"Oh, no, you must not pay her," Riggers replied, quite misunderstanding her meaning. "I have made

you one great revenge. I have destroy, I have *massacre* all her pumpkins, as zey say in ze history; zare remain not one to tell ze tale. But I sall not pay for zoze pumpkin. Mrs. Coffin is very mad to me, but zat is nossing. Mrs. Harrigan sall not displease to you, no one sall displease to you, zat I sall nct make some unpleasant."

Trix grew grave. "It was good of you to fight my battles, Riggers," she said gratefully; "but I'm afraid you were a little too hard on poor Mrs. Harrigan;" and mentally Trix resolved to call upon her enemy, and make good the damage which had been inflicted for her sake.

"I am sorry, too," she added after a little reflection, "that you have offended dear Mrs. Coffin. She is such a sweet woman, and she seems so fond of you."

Riggers looked regretful, too; but he said nothing, and Trix turned the conversation to other subjects.

When they reached the island, they had their picnic, and afterward the boys built a great bonfire in a clearing in the midst of a pine-grove, and then swung hammocks between the trees, in which they sat and sang and told stories until the moon rose, when they carefully put out the fire, and, launching their canoes in a line, took hold of hands from one boat to another, and so drifted down the stream in company.

It was a glorious night. The moon was at full, and seemed to be coquetting with "the red planet Mars," which was near its occultation. Mrs. Courtney spoke

of the theory of the French astronomer, Camille Flammarion, that the planet is inhabited. Percy had never given his attention to the matter, and was much interested.

"It seems like a Jules Verne story," he said.

"Not at all," replied Mrs. Courtney. "The planet has continents and seas, atmosphere and seasons like our own. Possessing all the conditions of vegetable and animal life which our earth has, it would not be strange if it was populated in the same way."

"No," replied Percy, "not if it has air and water. Of course there could be no life without that."

"That is just where you take too much for granted," said Mrs. Courtney. "Camille Flammarion illustrates it in this way. Imagine some of the fishes which we see darting about under the surface of this river meeting in a piscatorial Academy of Sciences to discuss the question whether there were living beings out of the water. Some wild young explorer of a trout in his leaps had seen, or thought he had seen, people gliding about in canoes. But some old savant of a mud eel immediately crushes the imaginative flights of the youthful trout by replying, 'Such theories are impossibilities. Experience teaches that when a fish is lifted out of his native element he dies. No fish can live out of the water; therefore there can be no life beyond it.'"

"I see," said Percy, "we are to conclude from this that there may be beings so constituted that they can breathe carbonic acid gas."

"Precisely."

"How do they know that there are seasons at Mars — spring, summer, autumn, and winter — such as we have here?"

"Its position in regard to the sun would indicate as much; and then, astronomers have observed its polar snows increasing and decreasing, — stretching down into the temperate regions in winter, and melting away and retreating during the summer."

"With earth, water, and summer, it does seem natural that there might be plants and trees. Have astronomers seen any traces of them?"

"They would have to be enormous to be visible with our strongest telescopes; but some scientists believe that the ruddy color of the planet is occasioned by red foliage."

"How absurd! Red grass and trees! It does not seem possible."

"Why not? Our maples have red foliage in the autumn."

"Sure enough. But even if Mars is inhabited, if they have creatures there at all resembling men, how do we know that they are beings of intelligence, and not mere wandering savage tribes?"

"Simply from inference. Mars is an older planet than the earth, and its inhabitants have had more time to develop intellectually. It seems to me that the plan of signalling our neighbors is very feasible."

"Has that been thought of seriously?"

"Yes. A lady has left a fund for establishing com-

munication between the earth and Mars. Flammarion proposes that an area as large as the island of Sicily be set aside for this purpose. Then he suggests that an enormous triangle be outlined with great electric lights; that this be kept up for a certain number of nights, and then changed to a square, and finally to a circle. The observers in Mars cannot fail to understand that these figures could never have been produced by chance, and will probably reply; and the next step to a code will be a very simple one."

"Tremendous!" exclaimed Percy. "And to think I may be operator at the Interplanetary Signal Station! But all this takes it for granted that the intelligent inhabitants of Mars are as much interested in us as we are in them; that their astronomers have telescopes equal in power to our own; and that they have been watching us, and puzzling over this same problem of communication."

"It seems quite likely that their attention was turned toward the heavens earlier in their development than ours, for their nights are much more glorious than ours, as they have two moons instead of one, and nearer their planet than ours is to us."

"What jolly moonlight nights they must have for canoeing! You say they have seas. I suppose they have rivers, too, overhung with autumn foliage all summer long."

"Mars has been carefully mapped by astronomers, and there are certain long straight lines which have

been called canals. One Italian, Schiaparelli, believes that he has discovered parallel canals, running across the planet at a distance of fifty miles from each other. Scientists say that if these have been artificially constructed to unite the seas, they prove that engineering has been carried to a wonderful degree of excellence in Mars."

"Is not Mars the most beautiful of the planets?"

"It is undoubtedly the one which has excited most attention. Venus is perhaps as beautiful, and she is our nearest interior neighbor, — that is, her orbit is within our own. But on that very account it is more difficult to observe her. She is nearer the sun, and is only visible for a short time just after sunset or before sunrise, when she is seen near the horizon, and through a stratum of the earth's dust and mist, which renders the view indistinct. Mars, on the contrary, being a superior planet, our next neighbor on the outside, has a wider field, and is frequently seen, as to-night, shining clear far up in the heavens. It is not strange that so conspicuously beautiful an object should have attracted the attention of poets as well as astronomers. Do you remember Longfellow's poem to Mars?"

Percy was ashamed to say that he did not, and Mrs. Courtney repeated: —

"There is no light in earth or heaven,
But the cold light of stars ;
And the first watch of night is given
To the red planet Mars.

“ And earnest thoughts within me rise,
When I behold afar,
Suspended in the evening skies,
The shield of that red star.

“ O star of strength ! I see thee stand
And smile upon my pain ;
Thou beckonest with thy mailed hand,
And I am strong again.

“ Within my breast there is no light
But the cold light of stars ;
I give the first watch of the night
To the red planet Mars.

“ The star of the unconquered will,
He rises in my breast,
Serene and resolute and still,
And calm and self-possessed.

“ And thou, too, whosoe’er thou art,
That readest this brief psalm,
As one by one thy hopes depart,
Be resolute and calm.

“ Oh, fear not in a world like this,
And thou shalt know erelong,
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong.”

The full beauty of these lines did not dawn upon Percy, as yet he knew nothing of that sublime suffering which is the soul's purification ; but he had been deeply interested. He said to himself that escorting a lady of a certain age was more amusing than he had anticipated.



MRS. COFFIN AND RIGGERS AT THE PRIDES' TOMB.

It could hardly be said of Mrs. Courtney that to know her was a liberal education; but she was one of the few persons who have a knack of interesting young people in subjects which might otherwise not attract them. Percy admired her greatly. If that vague feeling of slight had not left its unpleasant taste, he could have said that he preferred her company to that of any one else in the party. As it was he thought, "The next time that we fellows have a chance to show our preference I shall invite Mrs. Courtney, just to show Trix Huntington that I did n't have such a bad time, after all."

CHAPTER VIII.

A DONATION PARTY. — RIGGERS IN TROUBLE.

A DONATION party of the old-fashioned kind is a ghastly affair. It is frequently an attempt at a surprise which surprises no one, an attempt at amusement which amuses no one, and an attempt at generosity which nearly ruins the recipients. Well-meaning Miss Letitia told Mrs. Coffin in confidence that Deacon Stebbins had hinted that "so long as the Prudential Committee were so behind-hand in raising the minister's salary, it might be a good idee if the women-folks would stir round and get up some kind of a donation as a surprise, to sorter encourage the minister." The Ladies' Sewing Society had taken the hint with alacrity, and "Mrs. Heywood was a-going around with a paper."

Mrs. Coffin flushed slightly when she heard this; but she repressed all sinful feelings of pride. Her husband needed a vacation badly; perhaps they were intending to make up a purse to send him away for a fortnight's rest and recreation. She fell into a

muse as to whether he would think it his duty to attend the convention at Saratoga, or whether he would go instead to Old Orchard Beach; and if so, was it beyond imagination's utmost flight to hope that there might be enough contributed to enable her to accompany him? She came out of her day-dream in time to hear Miss Letitia say: "Pretty much all the parish are coming, and I thought it was no more 'n right to give you warning; for though they'll bring cake, the men-folks like to set down to a cold-meat supper, and they'll expect hot coffee and rolls. The last time they had the sociable at the Billingses', Mrs. Billings pervided a wash-biler full of rolls, and they run short before the evenin' had fairly begun.' Zimri Jones came prepared to pay his pew-rent; but he was so mad because the tongue sandwiches give out, and they had only ham ones to offer him, that he went hum without paying it."

Miss Letitia's hint was not to be disregarded, and Mrs. Coffin prepared generously for an unknown number of guests. The result proved that she had underestimated the attendance. Old and young, high and low, rich and poor, the cultured and the ignorant, the fashionable summer boarder from Great Folly and the rustic dweller on the hills of Wayback, swarmed into the parsonage, and filled it from garret to foundation stone, overflowing upon the verandas and the lawn, an utterly heterogeneous and not to be amalgamated herd, with apparently but one common impulse, — to feed and to destroy.

“ They brought the pie to the parson’s house,
And scattered the floor with crumbs,
And marked the leaves of his choicest books
With the prints of their greasy thumbs.

“ The next day the parson fell on his knees —
Good soul ! it was not to pray,
But to scrub the stains of the jelly and grease
From the parlor carpet away.”

No common amusement could be invented for people of such diverse interests. The men-folks hung about the door and stood in the hall talking over their crops. The older women sat stiffly in the parlor, and talked of the three D’s which are said to be the only topics on which women converse with enthusiasm, — their diseases, their dress, and their domestics. The children had carried the dining-room chairs out on the lawn, and were playing “ Clap in and clap out ; ” but the youths and maidens of sixteen and upward were standing about shyly, not knowing what to do with themselves.

It was at this juncture that Mrs. Courtney gathered them into the minister’s study to try a new game. Percy produced some of his father’s sermon paper, which Mrs. Courtney cut in slips, presenting two to each person present, and asking every one to write a question on one of the slips, and a word, preferably a difficult word to rhyme, upon the other. The slips were then collected, shuffled, and re-distributed, each person receiving a word and a question not of his or her own writing. Next, each was required to

write a jingle answering the question and bringing in and rhyming the word.

We can best illustrate this game by giving several of the jingles thus written on the spur of the moment.

Percy, thinking of the talk on the canoe-trip, had contributed the word "Mars ;" and Amy Heywood had written the question, "Will you go out by the light of the moon?" This combination fell to Mr. da Souza; and he wrote the following:—

"I'd rather stroll beneath the stars.
 The moon is fickle, and it jars
 Upon my heart like railroad cars ;
 And then one thinks of stern papas.
 The moon is chilly too, — but Mars !
 He warms a feller's inner plan,
 And kind of lengthens out the span
 Which folks do say belongs to man.
 So on the whole — Good-by, Dian !"

Mrs. Courtney's question was "What is art for art's sake?" Humphrey wrote the word "rhinoceros," and this was what Trix made of the two:—

"Art for art's sake
 Is a lady-like fake,
 A term very modern and hard to declare;
 But the horned rhinoceros
 An answer may toss her us
 Out of the depths of his African lair."

Trix had decided that the word "incompatibility" would be a hard one to rhyme. Some one else had

given as a question, "Are you coming back next summer?" And Mrs. Courtney answered it thus: —

"Just as my present efforts are
Complete in their futility
To find the proper word to rhyme
With incompatibility;

"So easy shall my answer be,
Given with all humility;
I am coming back next summer
If the wish is the ability."

Humphrey puzzled for a long time over the question, "Who invented this game?" striving at the same time to rhyme the word "cushion," and at length passed it over to Percy, who dashed off the following:

"If we knew who made this wretched game
And wished a rhyme for cushion,
The grave at once should be his hame;
We'd give him one good push in."

Riggers' question was "What becomes of all the pins?" and the accompanying word was "taxes;" and after laboring for ten minutes in all seriousness, he evolved something which he called a "pome," and he could not at all understand why every one laughed when he read: —

"Perhaps some monstrous fairy fish
Who swim under ze crackses,
Sinks pins and needles a dainty dish,
And don't never sometimes pay taxes."¹

¹ These rhymes were gathered by permission from a party of this kind where they were improvised.

After the young people had tired of this game, the subject of the Fire Company was brought up. Some of the older young men present thought that it was a very good plan, and proposed the formation of a Hook and Ladder Company.

"If you get up anything of the kind," said Trix, "you will have to call it Fire Company B, for Fire Company A has already been organized."

"Oh, you six boys will never do anything!" said Ira Stebbins, in a particularly provoking way. "Your company has been in existence for nearly two months, and what have you accomplished?"

"We have had an entertainment and raised the funds for our equipment, and what more could we do?" Trix demanded indignantly. "There has 'nt been a fire in Little Wisdom all summer."

"And if there had been," Ira replied, "I'd like to know what good your full treasury would have done. Money in the bank does n't put out flames, if your Company has n't enough interest to buy its outfit and drill. It would not have gained its funds but for you. You are the best man in the Company, Miss Trix. It is well that a fire seldom occurs in Little Wisdom, for your Trundle-Bed Fire Company would be of no use if it did. It is time that the older fellows took the matter in hand."

Little Jack Huntington crept close to his sister's side, and listened indignantly. "I guess we will show them that Fire Company A is good for something," he said.

"Yes," said Humphrey; "if a fire ever does occur, Little Wisdom may have cause to thank her Trundle-Bed Fire Company. But, Percy, you ought to buy those buckets and get the boys together to drill. You heard what Ira Stebbins was saying. Really now, Percy, you ought to hustle."

Bricktop and Riggers looked at Percy significantly. He flushed, and muttered something about there being plenty of time; there never was a fire in Little Wisdom.

"But we don't know when there may be one," Trix urged, "and we must be prepared. It would be dreadful to have a fire happen and Company A not be ready."

"And worse still," said Humphrey, "to have Company B sail in and scoop all the glory."

"Oh, hustle, do hustle, Percy!" Jack whispered, "and I'm sure there will be a fire for you to put out before Company B is ready. I can almost *promise* you there will be a fire."

Trix smiled at Jack's vehemence. Riggers and Bricktop continued to look at Percy and to keep silence. Percy was beginning to feel very uncomfortable, and he promised to go to Great Folly the next day and see about it.

After the company had gone, Riggers said to him: "I've got three dollars you can haf toward ze buckets. I was save it up to pay back Mrs. Harrigan her pumpkins. I sink your mother would like better if I did zat."

"Oh, never mind, Mrs. Harrigan!" said Percy; "she don't deserve anything. Don't waste your money on her, and of course it would help me a lot. I've got a dollar of my own. Now, if Bricktop can let me have a V, I'm all right."

"What are you two boys talking about so earnestly?" asked Mrs. Coffin. She was very weary. The last guest had but just departed, and there was much to do in the way of putting to rights before she could retire. She was disappointed, too; for instead of giving the money (which she had mentally appropriated to a vacation trip for her husband and possibly for herself), the committee had presented the minister with an armchair for his study.

There were chairs enough in his study now; and this was covered with a jute tapestry which jarred with (Humphrey said swore at) the colors in the study carpet. It was hard for Mrs. Coffin to smile her thanks; but she had done so very bravely, even when Mrs. Billings called her attention to the fact that the covering was very durable, and she heard Mrs. Courtney murmur, "That's the worst of it; when anything is particularly hideous, it never will wear out."

Now that all was over and she felt almost like breaking down, she saw Riggers talking excitedly and as she thought slyly to Percy, and her suspicions took fire at once, especially as Percy raised his finger to his lips and Riggers was suddenly silent. She waited a moment, and as her question was not answered sent Riggers to bed, and then called Percy

back as he was following without kissing her good-night.

"Can't you tell me what you were talking about, my son?" she asked again.

"Nothing in particular," Percy replied, evading her gaze.

Mrs. Coffin sighed. "Too late," she thought; "my quarantine is too late. Percy has caught the contagion already; I have lost his confidence."

Percy heard the sigh. "Don't look so distressed," he said; "if you must know every little thing, I was planning to go over to Great Folly to-morrow to get the buckets for the Fire Company, that's all."

"Then why did you not tell me so?"

"I don't know; I suppose because we don't want the affairs of our Company talked over. The older fellows are getting up an opposition company, and we want to cut in ahead of them."

"And was this really all you were saying?" Mrs. Coffin longed to believe that she had been over-anxious, and Percy looked up brightly and frankly. He had told a part of the truth, and it seemed to him that he had said all that was necessary.

"Of course, mother. When will you learn to trust me?"

She sighed again, but it was a sigh of relief, and she kissed him good-night with a lightened heart. Percy ran up to bed, never thinking to offer to help her. Mr. Coffin had already retired, and he would want the house quiet. As she moved about she was

startled by a step on the stair; then some one was unlocking the front door. She stepped into the hall. Riggers stood there half dressed. "I remember ze chairs zat clap in clap out on ze lawn," he said; "I come down help you."

She did not believe him. "He thought I had gone to my room," she said to herself, "and he slipped down to leave the house." She finished her work just as Riggers lugged in the last chair. "Anysing more I do for you?" he asked, smiling.

"Yes," she replied, "I want you to pay Mrs. Harrigan for spoiling her pumpkins."

Riggers scowled. "Some time, maybe. I not got money now."

"But Mr. Coffin gave you your allowance yesterday. What have you done with it all?"

Riggers was silent.

"Oh, Riggers, Riggers! I am afraid you are not a good boy; but tell me, for your own sake, all about it."

The boy made an impulsive motion as though about to say something, then turned abruptly, took his candle, and mounted the stairs.

The next day Percy set out for Great Folly. On the way he stopped at the Heywood farm; but Bricktop could not give him five dollars. He could not even lend him the amount; for his father was a close-fisted man, and allowed his children no pocket-money.

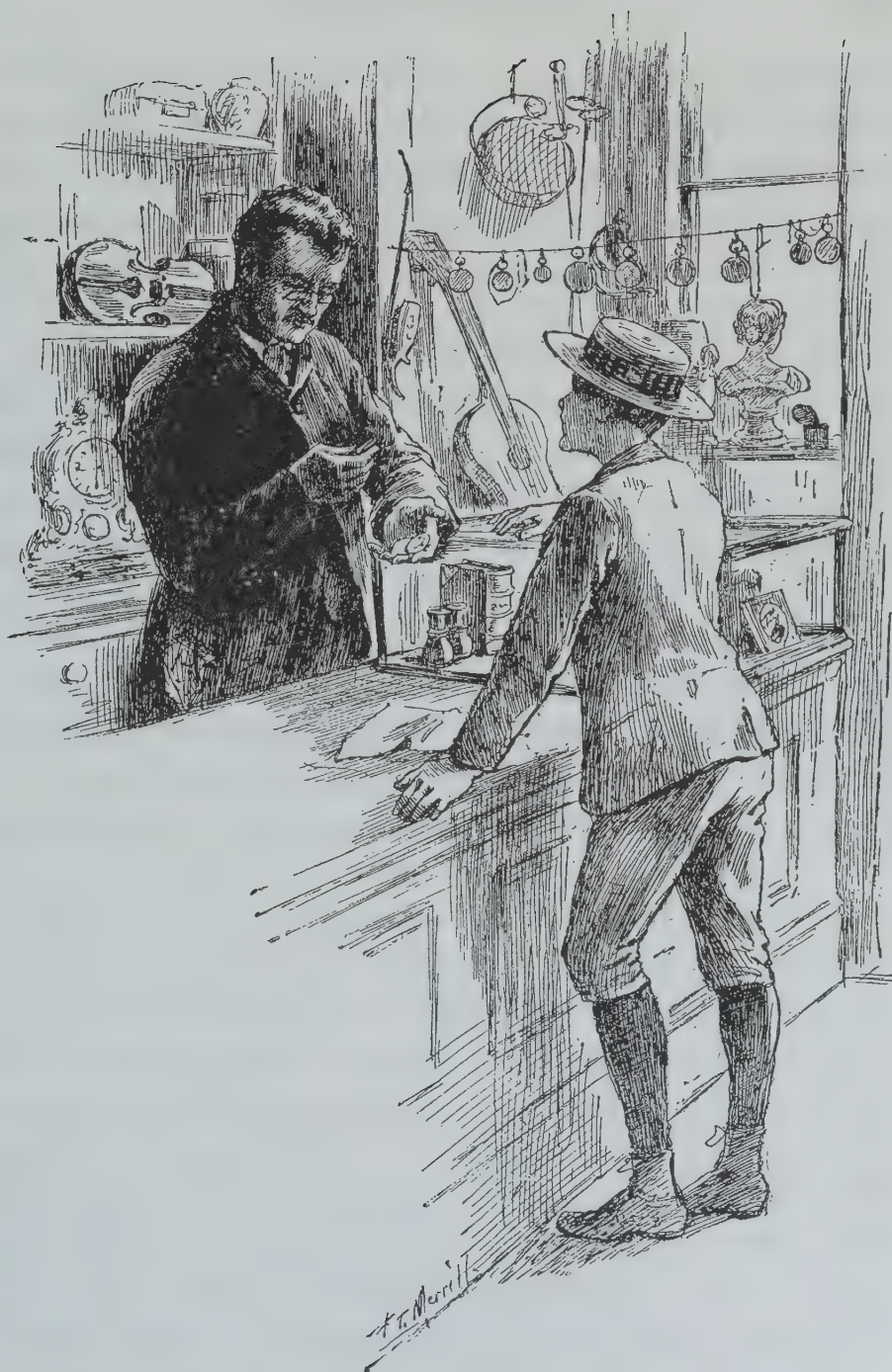
"Never mind," said Percy, hopefully. "I'll go over all the same. Perhaps I can get trusted for the part that is wanting."

As he had lost some time in calling on Bricktop, he took a short cut through the cemetery. There was a gap in the hedge by which he could reach the highway. He would have, it was true, to pass Mrs. Harrigan's ; but he did not mind this, as her son was not at home. The twigs caught in the pocket of his coat, and detained him as he pushed his way through the hedge. Stooping to free himself, he noticed a small chamois-skin bag caught in the thicket. "This hedge is a regular pickpocket," he said to himself; "it has skinned this bag out of some one's possession without his knowledge, I'll be bound. I wonder what there is in it. Something round and hard, — maybe gold pieces."

He opened the bag, and found that it contained a dozen beautifully cut unset cameos, each carefully wrapped in tissue-paper. The subjects were classical, — Cupid sharpening his arrows at Vulcan's forge, Psyche and her butterfly, Pandora opening her box, and others. Percy knew that the collection was a valuable one, and decided that he would put up a notice on his return in the Little Wisdom post-office, asking the loser to describe and claim his property.

On reaching Great Folly he was disappointed to find that the fire-buckets could not be obtained without the ready cash. What would the boys say if the local expressman who ran between Great Folly and Little Wisdom returned without them?

He racked his brain for some excuse to offer, but could think of none. As he strolled disconsolately



PERCY IN THE PAWNBROKER'S SHOP.



through the town, his eye was caught by a sign over a pawnbroker's shop: "Money lent on Bric-a-brac and Antiques. The highest price paid for old silver and jewelry." He wondered whether he could pawn the cameos, and redeem them before they were inquired for.

His conscience told him that he had no right to do this; but he smothered its warnings, stepped into the shop, and showed the proprietor the cameos. The man regarded him keenly. "He has stolen these," he thought, "and will never return to redeem them;" but he only said, "Five dollar, one monse time."

Five dollars! It was just what he so desperately needed now, and he could surely raise it in one month. He hesitated for an instant, then thought, "It's no worse than the box I am in now;" and desperately and unscrupulously he accepted the man's offer.

Someway, as he rode home in the express-wagon, with the red buckets stacked behind, he did not feel so relieved as he had fancied he would; and though Mrs. Huntington, Trix, and Jack passed him in their pony-cart as the express drew up at the post-office, and Trix expressed her pleasure that at last Fire Company A could begin drilling, and little Jack clapped his hands with glee, and wished for a fire that very night, he was not happy.

Mrs. Courtney stopped on the office steps, and pinned a notice, headed "Lost," on the bulletin board; and at first Percy dared not read it, so sure

was he that she was the owner of the missing cameos. After a time he glanced at it furtively, and drew a long breath when he saw that it was only a silver-handled umbrella.

That afternoon Fire Company A drilled, and in the excitement of drawing water and passing the buckets in line between the well and an imaginary fire in the pig-pen, Percy partly forgot his trouble. They deluged the inmates, much to their disgust; but this Percy was sure did no harm, for Madam Hog was very much in need of a bath.

Percy had thrown his jacket on his bed on donning his fireman's shirt of scarlet flannel; and his mother, finding it there, examined it to see whether it needed mending. As she turned the pockets inside out, she came upon the pawn-ticket, and looked at it with consternation. What could it mean? She transferred it to her own purse, and determined to ask Percy about it that night when she went to his room to tuck him up and give him his good-night kiss. This was the time when they always talked over their confidences and small troubles, — when the boy sobbed out his confessions, and mother and son prayed over them together, and kisses of forgiveness and promises of amendment were interchanged. This had been before Riggers shared Percy's room; and the mother thought with relief of Percy's removal to the attic bedroom where their old confidences could be renewed. Still, how could he explain this pawn-ticket? There were none of his few belongings

missing. What could he have pawned? What reason could he have had for pawning anything? Instinctively her mother's heart told her that something was wrong, and all her vague alarms which had been quieted returned to give her pain. Some way she was sure that it was Riggers' fault. If Percy had gone wrong, it must be through his influence. This was not the first time that Percy had given her anxiety. Her happiness, her very life, was centred upon the boy. She had a heart trouble which no one knew of; and when, as now, a tormenting doubt in regard to her boy seized her, the old physical pain came with it, and she knew that if Percy should grow up a wicked man she would die.

The greatest observer of human nature who has ever lived, has written: "There is naught on earth so miserable as she that hath a son and sees him err."

If boys could only know how their mothers' hearts go up and down, as in the most delicate of scales, with their good or bad conduct; how the medal that marks them "a member of the legion of honor," how an unselfish act, a considerate, thoughtful word, a loving caress, anything that shows principle or affection, gives their mothers a new lease of life, and keeps back the wrinkles and the gray hairs,—they would deny themselves every unworthy pleasure for her dear sake.

Mrs. Coffin could scarcely wait for bedtime. Percy caught her pathetic pleading glance at supper-time, and understood it. "She knows something," he said to himself. "Now, what is it?"

He knew when she would ask an explanation of what troubled her, and he determined to be so late that night that she would be obliged to retire first.

"Where are you going, Percy?" Mrs. Coffin asked, as she saw him take his cap from the rack.

"Trix Huntington asked me to come over to their house this evening to try a new game."

Riggers looked up in surprise that he had not also been invited.

"Aren't you going to kiss me good-by, dear?" Mrs. Coffin asked, as Percy edged toward the door.

"Oh, certainly. Don't sit up for me."

"You will not be late?"

"No; but you look tired."

"I am never tired, if everything is right with my boy."

Percy's eyes were averted, and he did not reply. His conscience was at work, and he was very miserable. "The way of transgressors is hard," and the outward difficulties which hedge their path are the lightest of their troubles. Before a conscience has been so seared by repeated crimes that evil seems good, while the nature of the wrong-doer is still sensitive, his self-respect will lash him unmercifully for his sin. He will despise and loathe himself; and this misery, keen as it is, is God's greatest blessing sent to lead him to repentance. Percy walked up and down the village street twice before entering the Huntingtons'.

He tried to puzzle some way out of his trouble, but

could think of none until he could save five dollars to redeem the cameos. He told himself that it would only distress his mother to confess what had happened at Mrs. Harrigan's. As for Riggers, it was hard to make him bear the blame of wrong-doing of which he was innocent, but it could not be helped. He seemed to be reasoning in a circle with no way out of his difficulties; and to escape fruitless thinking about them he presented himself at the Huntingtons'.

"Why didn't Riggers come?" was Trix's first question.

"Riggers is in the dumps," Humphrey remarked before Percy could answer. "I can't understand him; he is a funny fellow."

Mr. Huntington looked up sharply from his paper. "Is he subject to such moods?" he asked.

"Oh, no," Percy replied uneasily, "not often."

"He always seemed to me very light-hearted and enthusiastic," said Trix, "just bubbling over with a perpetual flow of good spirits."

"He's a queer chap," Humphrey repeated. "Sometimes he's up and sometimes he's down. Just now he's diving after the unfathomable. Maginty is n't a circumstance to him."

"Why don't you try to chirk him up, Percy, find out what's the matter, and *make* him come over here this evening?"

"No use, he's as obstinate as a pig; and you never can get anything out of him. He may have had news from home that he does n't like. Nothing serious, I

mean; but perhaps they don't allow him as much money as he wants, or something of that kind."

Mr. da Souza came forward. Percy had not noticed him, but he had been listening with interest. "Did you say that Riggers had heard lately from his parents?" he asked.

"Yes," Percy replied, — "that is, I don't know, but he usually receives a letter this afternoon. Perhaps it has n't come, and that's the cause of his sulks."

Mr. da Souza looked meaningly at Mr. Huntington, and rose to take his leave.

"By the way," said Mrs. Huntington, "when we were at Great Folly this afternoon we saw that set of cameos which Mr. Glitter wished to exchange for the necklace displayed in a pawn-broker's window."

"Are you sure it was the same set?" Mr. Huntington asked.

"Perfectly; I examined them carefully, and inquired in regard to them. The pawn-broker said he had just received them. They had been left by a boy."

Percy looked askance at Mrs. Huntington. Was it possible that she suspected him? But, no; he was farthest from her thoughts, for she went on composedly: "I thought very likely that the boy must have been merely a messenger."

"Without doubt, and possibly from Mr. Glitter himself. What do you think of this, Mr. da Souza? It may be a clew of great importance. Glitter may be in hiding in the vicinity."

"I hardly think that. It seems to me that he would not have allowed the cameos to be placed on public exhibition if that were true. He must know that they would lead to his discovery."

"There is something in that, too; but, Da Souza, you will know how to manage the matter, and I am sure the possibility is of enough importance to have the person who claims the cameos arrested!" Mr. da Souza and Mr. and Mrs. Huntington had been speaking in a low tone. They fancied the young people so occupied with their game as not to notice what was said; but Percy had listened from the start with agonized attention. A cold perspiration started at Mr. Huntington's last remark. It would never do now to claim the cameos. He would destroy the pawn-ticket and never go near the shop again. Instinctively his hand stole into his jacket-pocket. The ticket was not there! Where had he lost it? He wished himself at home to search for it; but Trix now insisted on his giving his attention to the new game.

It was called Buried Cities. Each person was to take the name of a city, and weave it into a sentence as ingeniously as possible, and in such a way as not to misspell it or to separate the syllables by other words or to destroy their sequence, but still disguising it as much as possible.

Trix gave as an example the following sentence: " 'Little Annie' was a comic *air* of great popularity." The italicized letters give the city Cairo; but as the

sentence was not even written out, no one guessed it, and Trix had to explain the puzzle.

Humphrey then gave a shorter sentence, which proved much easier: "*Mackerel is bony*;" and Trix guessed it immediately.

Mr. Huntington became interested and remarked: "*Oklahoma has lost its boom.*"

"Is that a statement of fact?" asked Mrs. Huntington, "or have we here another Herculaneum?"

"Omaha!" shouted Humphrey, before Mr. Huntington replied; and little Jack, who was quick at puzzles, propounded, —

"In a tub, rub a *dub*, linen goes."

"That sounds like the song of an Irish washer-woman," said Trix.

"She is Irish," Jack replied; "she comes from Dublin. Don't you see?"

All laughed; and Percy, who had resolutely turned his mind from his trouble, asked how many students it would take to "*phil Adelphi academy.*" But this Trix ruled out, as not conforming to the regulation that the spelling must be correct.

"Don't go to mill *on donkey-back*," said Humphrey.

"London!" cried Jack, triumphantly. "You do give such easy ones, Hunx; see if you can guess this one: As we passed the castle, a *dove rose* in the air."

"The disclosures in this last divorce suit," said Mr. Huntington, pretending to have found something in

his newspaper, "are like the bursting of a *bomb*, *ay*, even a thunderbolt, and make one wonder whether marriage is a *sacrament* or not."

"Dear me! what a roundabout way to get to California, — *via* India!" said Trix.

"Here is a submerged island that you may have passed on your way: Don't slobber *mud* all over my clothes," suggested Humphrey. "See here, Percy, you are not so bright as usual to-night; can't you give us something?"

"I was just wondering whether I could *wheel* ingots — or gather *buff aloes*," said Percy, trying to pull himself together.

"Too far-fetched altogether," said Trix. "You remind me, Percy, of the young lady who wrote a poem on "Scattered Thoughts," and the editor said it was out of proportion, — too much scatter to the amount of thought. Why ought your Aunt Caroline to have been reminded of a city in Persia and an Asiatic island by her first visit here?"

"Are they buried in that sentence?" asked Percy.

"No; but they are in the answer: Because Billy tried to *bite her*, and that was an insult not to be *borne* or lightly passed over."

"Here is one suggested by your mention of the Orient," said Mr. Huntington, "though the city itself is nearer home: Let each worship the great *Allah* as seems to him best."

It was some time before this was guessed, and

then Mrs. Huntington gave the best one of the evening. It was not original, but she could not remember where she had seen it: "Gherkins and ale are very good cheer. I love bitter *ale*; I *gherkins* adore."

Trix jotted down the following list of others made by different members of the company, and varying in merit:—

This is a very peculiar *omen*.

A beautiful *amber linked chain*.

Papa rises early, but takes a *nap* lest he should be sleepy before night.

You have *nice* color because you are out of doors so much.

Which do you admire the more,—the monkey or *kangaroo*?

The city is *picturesque* because it is situated on a river.

Little Jack had been silent ever since Trix referred to Lady Caroline. "I am trying," he said, "to make one about Mr. Glitter's wanting to Pekin and Aggravating Billy."

"You can't make that spell correctly," said Percy. Why would the conversation persist in drifting toward the robbery? Now that Jack had started it, there were no more buried cities; and Trix even referred to the cameos which she had seen when with her mother at Great Folly. "Have you read Richard Harding Davis's story of the girl who bought medals which had been left in pawn, and called them her collection of 'dishonored honors'? I mean to buy those cameos,

for I don't believe they will ever be redeemed, do you?"

"No," Percy replied, though the words almost choked him, "I don't believe they will be redeemed."

He could stand this no longer, and rose abruptly and bade them all good-night.

On leaving the Huntingtons', Mr. da Souza had gone directly to the post-office, and had ascertained that Riggers had not yet received his usual letter from home. Could it be possible that he had had news in some indirect way? As he entered the parsonage, he found Mrs. Coffin sitting alone in the little sitting-room. A great basket of mending stood before her; but for once the thin, busy hands lay idly crossed in her lap.

"Has Riggers confided anything to you?" Mr. da Souza asked.

"No," she replied sadly; "but, Mr. da Souza, have you followed up this mysterious Mr. Glitter? I am so in hopes that the guilt will be fastened upon him, and not upon poor 'Riguez."

"So I have hoped; and a visit which I intend to make to-morrow to a pawn-shop in Great Folly may assist me in discovering his whereabouts."

Mrs. Coffin started. "Strangely enough, here is a pawn-ticket which I have found which may aid you. But was there anything stolen from Mr. Huntington's house which might have been pawned?"

"No; but this pawn-ticket may be a clew of great importance. I have a clew, and this ticket dovetails

exactly with it. Riggers must have been the boy of whom I am now in search."

"I ought to tell you," Mrs. Coffin added very bravely, "that I found this in my son's pocket, not in 'Riguez'. I hope you will allow me to ask him to explain it before you act upon it."

"I would rather not, Mrs. Coffin; he may know nothing about it. Riggers is sly enough to have placed it in Percy's pocket, fearing that it might be found in his possession; or he may have asked Percy to redeem the articles in pawn for him. I would rather make a few investigations before speaking to Percy about it. Meantime, if Percy asks for the ticket, let me know. Depend upon it that whatever Percy has had to do with this affair, he is quite innocent, and has simply acted for Riggers."

"That was the conclusion which I had reached in my own mind," replied Mrs. Coffin; "but I wish you would let me talk to Percy."

"Presently," replied Mr. da Souza; "but first let me talk to Riggers. I would rather go right to headquarters. Good-night."

"Good-night. Since I must not speak to Percy, I would rather not meet him to-night;" and Mrs. Coffin took her candle and retired. Mr. da Souza was dissatisfied and impatient. His investigations were not prospering as he had wished. He had discovered absolutely nothing, and dreaded shilly-shallying any longer. He determined that since Mrs. Coffin's kindly efforts had failed in extracting anything from

Riggers, he would resort to extreme measures and try frightening the boy into confession.

Finding that he had retired, Mr. da Souza went directly to his room. A timid "Comb in" greeted his imperative knock. Riggers had started bolt upright in bed. He had not been sleeping, and his eyes were red with weeping. Mr. da Souza's heart would have softened at his manifest distress if he had not regarded it as a possible sign of guilt. He accordingly took one of the boy's clammy hands in his, and held his candle where he could study his face while he said distinctly:

"My boy, I'm sorry for you, but there is no use of trying to keep your secret any longer; we know everything."

A great glad light swept over Riggers' face. "Oh, I am *so* glad, so glad! He has zen told! He ees noble, he ees grand. I luff him."

Mr. da Souza was completely mystified. He was ready to see Riggers cringe with abject terror; to cry out, to faint away. He was prepared for pretended surprise, stolidity, protestations, denials, or confessions, — for everything but this expression of absolute relief and happiness.

"So," he thought, "he is not the principal in this affair; he has been working as the confederate of some one else. Is it possible that he is an accomplice of Mr. Glitter?" Taking this supposition as the truth, he replied: "Mr. Glitter has not yet confessed, for we have not captured him; but we are on his track, and we only need your testimony to secure him."

You know that if you will truly tell everything about this matter you will not be punished; but if you persist in silence you will be arrested and imprisoned. I am a detective, and have legal authority to do what I have said."

The happy look faded out of Riggers' face, and was succeeded first by one of blank amazement, and then, as the meaning of Mr. da Souza's words dawned upon him, by horror and dismay.

"But I have nossing to do wiz Mr. Glitter, nos-sing," he exclaimed. "Ees it possible zat you sink me to be a tief! Oh, no, it ees not possible — it ees not, it ees not!" and he uttered a broken-hearted cry, which Mrs. Coffin heard, and which brought the tears to her eyes.

"Be quiet, Riggers, be calm. We do suspect you, and there is only one way for you to clear yourself from suspicion; and that is, to tell us truly where you were on the night of the robbery."

"And zat I will not tell, — neffer, neffer. But zare ees some one who will tell for me. He will not let me suffer, — be sent to ze prison. No, he will tell — to-morrow. You sall know to-morrow."

"I hope so, Riggers. I shall be very glad if you can prove yourself innocent. I will give until to-morrow at this time, when I will come to you and expect an explanation."

He left the room; and as he did so the thought occurred to him: "Now Riggers will probably run away. It will be useless to lock him in his room, for

he could let himself out of the window. I will simply sit up all night in the sitting-room beneath, and be ready to pounce upon him when he attempts it."

But Riggers had no thought of running away. He simply waited in agony and listened for Percy. When Percy returned, he was surprised to see the light burning in the sitting-room. "It is mother," he thought, "sitting up to have it out with me."

He slipped around to the rear of the house, and climbed in through the pantry-window. Then taking off his shoes, he stole upstairs to his attic bedroom so softly that neither Mr. da Souza nor Riggers heard him. Mr. da Souza listened acutely for several hours; then, becoming convinced that Riggers did not contemplate flight, he indulged in a nap upon the sofa; but Riggers never closed his eyes throughout the entire night. The disgrace to himself and to his parents, his father's anger, his mother's grief, were ever before him. He tossed and moaned and prayed, and started up to listen for Percy, crying, "He will not desert me,—he ees my friend, he ees my friend."

CHAPTER IX.

MR. HEYWOOD'S BULL. — THE FIRE.

EARLY the next morning Riggers dressed and stole up to Percy's room. He could endure his anguish no longer; and he wakened his friend, and poured out his story with many a passionate appeal to Percy's magnanimity.

It would be doing Percy injustice to say that he was not touched. He felt Riggers' friendly devotion, his sense of honor, which forbade him to clear himself; and his first impulse was to meet the situation with like nobility. "I will see Mr. da Souza to-night," he said. "I will be in your room when he comes for his explanation, and I will tell him everything."

Riggers was overjoyed; he embraced Percy with effusion, calling him his angel, his cherubim, his seraphim, his saint.

Under the temporary influence of Riggers' gratitude, Percy felt as if he had really performed the deed, and swelled with self-approbation.

"You see that I am not so dishonorable as you thought," he said, rather impatiently disengaging

Riggers' clasp about his neck. "There! run down, and believe in me after this."

Mr. da Souza and the boys were the first at the breakfast-table. The detective eyed Riggers curiously, and could not understand the look of pure delight which burned through his nervous excitement of manner.

"Is the boy going crazy?" he asked himself; for in no other way could he account for his gayety under the circumstances. He laughed, he joked, he grimaced, when Lady Caroline was not looking. He even mimicked that austere personage, taking from his pocket a lorgnette which he had constructed from a hair-pin, and using it in a most irresistible way. Even Mrs. Coffin, who caught him in the act, smiled as she reproved him.

Mr. da Souza was disgusted as well as puzzled by his apparent insensibility and frivolity, and, pushing his plate aside, he remarked to Mrs. Coffin that he had a slight headache, and intended to take a long walk. He might not be back to luncheon.

"You will not forget to come and see me to-night, ees it not?" Riggers called after him.

"If you anticipate the appointment with such pleasure, I will meet you now," he replied coldly.

Riggers looked at Percy, who sat opposite him with his back to Mr. da Souza; but Percy felt his courage oozing out at every pore, and he scowled a negative.

Aunt Caroline had just read aloud from the morning paper an account of the disgraceful way in which

a young college student had run through a large fortune by gambling.

"Percy," she said threateningly, "if I ever hear of your touching a card, you shall never have a penny of mine to help send you to college."

Percy knew that she would be as good as her word. Heroism was not such an easy thing as he had thought, and he preferred not to hasten matters. Perhaps before evening some way of escape might appear.

"To-night, to-night will do," said Riggers, "and don't you forget it."

"That boy is incorrigible in his effrontery," thought Mr. da Souza. "I wonder if he is meditating some trick." He called Mrs. Coffin aside, and asked her to keep a strict watch on Riggers' movements during the day. "Ask Percy to assist you in this, if necessary."

Mrs. Coffin did ask him, and it was one of the most wretched days of Percy's life. He did not know just why he was set to watch Riggers, but he comprehended that the boy was unjustly suspected of something. He assured his mother that there was no harm in Riggers; but she was not fully satisfied, and there was an unspoken question in her eyes which he could not meet.

During the forenoon Mr. da Souza returned and questioned Percy in regard to the pawn-ticket. He had not meant to tell another lie, but some way the words formed themselves, and before he was quite

aware of what he had said, he replied that he had found it. It seemed as if the reply had been spoken by some evil spirit at his elbow, for he had not thought up this explanation, and Mr. da Souza accepted it unquestioningly. Riggers' gayety jarred upon him.

"It seem as if to-night it would neffer comb," the boy said; and Percy had answered morosely, —

"It doesn't appear to strike you that I may not look forward to the evening as joyfully as you do."

"That ees so. I am an ungrateful, a selfish; but Mr. da Souza he surely will not tell your fazzer, or eef he does he will forgive you."

"No," said Percy, "you do not know him; he will never forgive me."

Riggers' gayety vanished in an instant. He slipped close to Percy, and put his arm around him.

"Don't wallow on me," Percy exclaimed impatiently. The boy's gratitude and affection were becoming unbearable, for in his secret heart Percy began to doubt his ability to keep his promise.

Riggers looked into Percy's face furtively, but withdrew his hand. He did not doubt his friend, but he understood the terrible ordeal through which he was passing.

They were walking together through the burying-ground, for Riggers had received a letter from his mother that afternoon which contained a remittance, and he wished to pay Mrs. Harrigan for the mischief which he had done. When he had asked Mrs.

Coffin's permission to do this, she had called Percy aside and asked him to go with Riggers. Percy had no desire to meet Mrs. Harrigan, and determined to wait in the burying-ground while he made the call, and he now told Riggers that he would wait for him at the gap in the hedge. As they parted, they both noticed a man sitting on the steps of the Pride tomb, smoking.

"I wonder if he ees ze man your muzzer saw here one day," Riggers said, and then ran on to the Harrigan cabin. Percy waited, and for want of anything else to do, watched the man. Presently he rose, threw away his cigar, and approached. He did not see Percy until quite near him. He drew back for an instant, and then lounged forward. He walked quickly but in a jerky way, as though one ankle were not so strong as the other.

A sudden thought came to Percy, and he asked boldly: "I beg pardon, but did you lose a bag of cameos here the other day?"

The man started. "Have you found such a bag?" he asked.

"I know a boy who did," Percy replied evasively.

"Then tell him to leave them at the post-office for Mr. Joseph Brown."

"How will he know that these are your cameos?" Percy asked.

"I can describe them," the stranger replied. "One represented Cupid forging arrows; another Pandora with her box;" and he proceeded to give the subjects

of the different cameos. "I see perfectly," he concluded, "that you are the boy who found them. Bring them here to me to-morrow at about this time. I shall be at that tomb, and I will give you an ample reward."

Riggers was approaching. He did not see the stranger, and he called loudly, —

"I say, Percy, ze carriage of ze Huntington ees to ze depot. I see him. Mr. Huntington is go away on ze car. I wonder if Mees Trix ees go too?"

The stranger turned, and then stopped. "Have you the cameos with you now?" he asked.

"No."

"Then bring them to me this evening."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

Percy was silent.

"You will bring them to Mrs. Harrigan's to-night, if you know what is good for yourself," he said.

Riggers came through the hedge, and the man returned to the Pride tomb.

Riggers was whistling blithely, and had not heard the sound of voices. "I feel more good," he said, "more good now I have pay zat woman. She ees pad, pad; but when I massacre her pumpkins, I make myself as her."

They walked back to Little Wisdom together, — Riggers chattering like a parrot, Percy moody and silent. As they approached the Huntingtons', they

noticed a commotion. A huge animal — which Percy thought might be a cow, but which Riggers declared was a buffalo — dashed through the open gates and up the driveway, while a number of men and boys came tearing down the street after it.

The boys ran forward, and at the gate met Bricktop, who came panting up, spent with running and shrieking, and covered with dust from having rolled in the road.

“It’s the prize bull,” he gasped. “Father bought it at the County Fair, and we were leading him home between us with two sticks fastened to a ring in his nose; but he was too strong for me, and jerked me off my feet. If I had n’t let go, he would have trampled on me. Then he became unmanageable, and father could n’t hold him, and he has turned in there. They’ve shut the gates, and he can’t get out; but the thing is, to catch him.”

“He’ll trample down all the flower-beds,” said Percy.

“Worser as zat,” cried Riggers. “Eef Mees Trix or any one else ees promenade in ze ground, he may keel her.”

“I hope the family were all in the carriage that you saw at the station,” said Percy.

The men and boys who had closed the wrought-iron gates were peering through them, but no one dared to go inside.

Suddenly Mike appeared running down the avenue.

“Howly Saint Pathrick!” he cried, “let me out, ye spalpeens! What baste is that that’s careerin’ and

cavortin' and disportin' himself through me hot-beds, a-smashin' the glass and a-devourin' the celery?"

"It's my bull," replied Mr. Heywood. "Help me catch him, Mike; that's a good fellow."

"Catch him, is it? Blue blazes and murther! catch him yourself if ye'z want him. Sure an' I have no use for the crayther."

"Is n't there a shed or an outhouse into which we could decoy him and then shut him up?"

"Sure the doore of the carriage-house is open. The Surrey's gane to the daypo, and I had the other carriages pulled out and was a-washin' 'em when the crayther appeared. I had the hose in me hand, but that scarified that I didn't think to squirt him, but jist took leg bail before he got a good sight at me."

"Have all the family gone to drive?" Percy asked.

"All but Masther Jack. He's about the place somewhere with Billy the dog."

"Poor little Jack!" Percy thought; "rambling fearlessly in the grounds within the power of that dreadful beast;" and Billy was no protection, for he had never regained his courage since the night of the burglary.

Suddenly a loud barking was heard in the direction of the stables.

"Howly Mother o' Marcies!" cried Mike; "he's found him."

Mr. Heywood opened the iron gate, and entered resolutely, though he was deadly pale. He hurried

toward the noise, but though he ran well some one outstripped him. It was Riggers.

"Come back, ye gossoon, come back!" roared Mike. "Sure the baste'll not make two mouthfuls of yez."

Riggers sped on. The bull was standing in the open space before the carriage-house, pawing the ground and bellowing angrily; while Billy, whose courage had been so much maligned, was dancing about him barking violently.

"Keep out of the way, Riggers," piped a childish voice from some unknown quarter; "I'm all right."

"Where are you?" cried Riggers.

"Here in the coupé; the bull can't get in, the door's too little."

"Yes; but you can't get out while he ees zere, and he might knock ze whole beezneess over. Nevaire mind; I fix him. Srow me your sash."

Jack threw the crimson silk sash which he wore out of the coupé window, and Mr. Heywood came up.

"I will get ze beast into ze carriage-house," said Riggers; "zen you shut ze door quick." At this instant Billy, who had heard the voices, dashed toward them; and the bull, catching sight of them at the same time, eyed them sullenly. Riggers slipped around in front of him, and waving the crimson sash after the manner of the Spanish banderilleros, backed toward the carriage-house.

The bull snorted and trotted toward him; then



RIGGERS AND THE BULL.

paused at the distance of a few feet, eying him suspiciously.

At that instant the Huntington carriage returned from the station, and was halted at the gates. Percy told Mrs. Huntington what had happened, and by standing on the seats of the carriage, they could look over the low hedge which screened the stable-yard; and see Riggers standing in the doorway of the carriage-house, gracefully waving the sash, approaching, taunting the bull, and then retreating to the door-sill. Suddenly the enraged animal lunged heavily forward, and Trix shrieked aloud. The beast was goring and trampling upon something crimson which lay on the floor. But it was only the scarf, which Riggers had flung far into the room as he skilfully leaped to one side; and he was now assisting Mr. Heywood to roll the doors together.

"*Vick machree!*" exclaimed Mike, who stood on the wheel; "but you've had some puir body's blessing, or you never could have done that at all, at all."

"Oh, wasn't he altogether too magnificent for anything! Oh, Percy, *did* you ever see anything so grand?" exclaimed Trix. Mrs. Huntington was silent, and yet she did not understand the deadly peril in which her own boy had been until Riggers opened the coupé door, and they came running down the avenue together.

"It was nossing, it was nossing," Riggers protested, in reply to her impassioned thanks. "If you

could but see how ze Brazilian gentlemen do it at ze bull-fight. Zat ees magnificent, zat ees fine. I have seen zose bull-fight many time on ze great saint's day in Brazil. It ees not like ze Spanish bull-fight; zat ees professional. It ees ze Portuguese bull-fight which we do cultivate; all ze young nobility are amateur of ze sport. Zey dress in ze court costume, light blue, pink, red, yellow satin, point lace, gold lace, silvaire, diamonds; ze hair powdaire, ze horses ze best in ze country, ze riding superb. My oncle ze Marquis Riguel Placidos ees great amateur. He have been in more as forty bull-fight. All ze great ladies go to see him; zey wave zare embroidered shawl; zey srow down flowers, cigarres, zare fans; zey go wild, he ees so handsome, such fine caballero. And we do not kill ze bull as in Spain, we only play wiz him a leetle. We do not kill ze horse; we do not kill ze man. It ees a polite, gentle, aristocrat sport; like your athletics. Not so brutal as ze foot-ball. Oh, no! Me, — I could not play foot-ball, I am not strong enough for ze rush-line. It ees too rough, too dangerous. I likes better ze bull-fight. Ze bull-fight is all athletics to once, — you must be good broad jump, you must be good high jump, you must run, you must dodge, you must srow ze weight, you must ride, and eef it be necessaire you must know to shoot and use ze sword. But not often. We do not kill ze bull if we can help. Ze better he fight, ze more ogly, ze more ze audience applaud him. A smart bull make to himself a reputation like a opera-

singer. My fazzer own a bull, Fandango. Zat bull have fought many time; when he fight, he make it lively, he make fun. When ze people see Fandango's name on ze big poster, zen ze sister of charity sell many many ticket for ze fight, make much money for ze orphanless children. You should have bull-fight here for get some money for ze Socity of Protection ze Animal, — what Mees Trix wish to make. Zat bull make good fighter. Meester Heywood, you let him fight, is it not?"

How handsome he looked as he enthusiastically described a sport which seems so foolish to us! Trix looked at him admiringly, and the look stirred the bitter waters in Percy's soul. It was nothing, he thought, to be a hero physically. He might have done this thing himself if he had seen it performed as often as Riggers had done; but this harder feat which lay before him, — Trix could never know the moral courage required to screw himself up to its performance. And what would be its reward? Disgrace, — contempt from every one. Could he bear it?

Jack saw how very serious he was looking, and sprang to his side. Percy was Jack's hero, and he was sorry that it was not Percy instead of Riggers who had rescued him.

"Never mind, Percy," he whispered. "You will do something a great deal more splendid than that. Just wait till we have a fire!"

Mr. Heywood stepped up to the carriage, and

apologized to Mrs. Huntington for the damage and alarm which his bull had occasioned.

"I've got through with him," he concluded. "I'll go straight over to Great Folly and sell him to the butcher, and I'll let him call for his purchase too. I don't undertake to deliver no such package. I don't care if he did take the prize at the Cattle Show. I've had enough of the critter, and I'll sell out cheap."

"An' don't yez be afther lettin' the grass grow under your foots," said Mike. "Sure, Mr. Huntington did n't build his carriage-house to take in such transient boarders as the loikes of he. And if it rains the night, and the carriages gets a wetting, it's yoursel' as will have to pay the damages."

Mr. da Souza came down from the house as the crowd dispersed. He had been in the library, and had not known what had happened. Percy felt that he ought to tell him of the man whom he had met in the burying-ground, but decided that the evening would be the best time; and declining Mrs. Huntington's invitation to tea, Riggers and he returned to the parsonage together. Mr. da Souza was busy with a new theory of the robbery, which had come to him that afternoon. He had determined to spend the night at the Huntingtons', but had sent no word of his intention to the parsonage. There was a special reason for this apparent neglect, as he did not care to have this plan known, and he had not forgotten his appointment with Riggers. "If the boy is as inno-

cent as he now seems," he thought, "and his happiness is not assumed, putting off hearing his vindication will not do him any harm; and if, on the contrary, there is something hidden that needs investigation, it is just as well to keep the screws on a little longer."

"To keep the screws on!" Modern legal investigation does not professedly allow the old method of submitting suspected criminals to the torture of the rack; but there are other means of mental torture, more exquisitely cruel than the old thumbscrews and other instruments of torture of the Duke of Alva's time, hidden away and rusting in the dungeons of the inquisition.

Bedtime had come at last, and Dr. Coffin had ordered the boys to retire. Riggers had timidly asked if Percy might sleep with him, but had been refused. They went upstairs together, however, and Percy stopped at Riggers' door. "Shall I send Mr. da Souza to your room when he shall comb?" Riggers asked.

"No," Percy broke out, his baser nature mastering him completely. "You may as well know it first as last, Riggers. I am not going to sacrifice myself for your sake. Get out of your scrape the best way you can. I have too much at stake. I have thought it all over to-day. I'd like to help, but I can't. It's too much to ask."

Riggers listened in horror; he could not believe that he heard aright. Percy had coldly determined to desert him,—it was impossible.

Mrs. Coffin appeared in the hall below. She did not like to see the boys talking together in this clandestine way.

“Good-night, Percy,” she called.

“Good-night,” he replied, and mounted the little staircase.

“Percy, come back,” Riggers cried piteously; and Percy turned on the staircase.

“What is it, 'Riguez?” Mrs. Coffin asked.

“Are you going to tell?” Percy asked in a low voice; and Riggers closed his door with a bang. Percy went on to his room, and Mrs. Coffin returned to her mending with a sigh.

Riggers threw himself on the floor, and raved like a maniac; but in all his agony he was silent. Lady Caroline was in the next room, and she should hear nothing. He felt himself deserted, lost; he expected momentarily the coming of Mr. da Souza, and the arrest and disgrace with which he had been threatened; but even now he had no thought of attempting to clear himself by informing upon Percy.

He foresaw his life as a convict, his father's anger, his mother's grief, and his heart swelled with rage and hatred for Percy; but he never once thought of proving his own innocence by testifying against his friend.

For another night he lay in agony; and as he clasped his burning, aching head, it seemed to him with reason that he must go insane. He almost wished that Mr. da Souza would come and end the

terrible suspense. Mr. da Souza did not come; but toward morning, just as weariness was beginning to deaden the mental anguish, a cry rang through the quiet street, coming nearer and nearer: "Fire! Fire!"

Yes, it was fire! and that was little Jack Huntington's voice, piping and shrill, but with a jubilant note in it, which showed that at last he had obtained his heart's desire. He was so hoarse that he could hardly shout when he reached the parsonage, but he seized the door-bell and fell backward with it violently several times, after the manner of the New York messenger-boy. Peal after peal rang through the house, starting the occupants from slumber. Riggers, who had not undressed, opened the door before Jack had ceased ringing.

"Where is it?" he asked, as he snatched the fire-bucket.

"Our stable. Such luck! Where's Percy?" But Riggers was half-way across the street, and Jack shouted, in fear that his favorite would not have a chance to distinguish himself: "Percy! Percy! Don't lose the fun! Our stable's on fire. Come quick, and save the horses."

When Riggers reached the stable, the fire had not yet burst through the roof, but there was a dense smoke and an almost suffocating smell of burning hay. Mike and Humphrey were busy blindfolding the horses and leading them out of their stalls, and no attempt was being made to extinguish the fire, which was making headway in the lofts overhead,

though several men had collected. "We can't get to it," some one explained, "except through the carriage-house, and Heywood's bull is loose in there. You can hear him rampaging about now, maddened with fear. There'll be death for some of us as soon as he gets loose."

"Why don't you shoot the bull?" cried Riggers.

None of the men replied; but Humphrey, who was clinging to his father's favorite saddle-horse, now plunging and nearly unmanageable with fright, shouted, "There's a rifle in father's bedroom; get it, Riggers."

The boy ran into the house, found the rifle, and was hurrying from the room, when Grandmother Huntington, who had been persuaded to take her son's room during his absence, awoke, and seeing a boy in the room with a gun, not unnaturally supposed that this was another burglary, and shouted, "Stop thief!" with might and main.

Grandmother Huntington's own room, which Mr. da Souza had occupied, was in the wing of the house farthest removed from the stables; and as there had as yet been but little noise attending the fire, he had not been awakened. But at Grandmother Huntington's cry he sprang from his bed, and collared Riggers.

"Let me go, let me go!" cried the boy, realizing at once his suspicions. "I am not a teef. Comb wiz me eef you will, but let me go. It ees to shoot ze bull, to save life! Ze stable is on fire! Let me

do zis *one* sing, zis one time, and zen you may take me to ze preeson."

Mr. da Souza could hear the shouts now and smell the smoke, and he realized his mistake. He had only partly undressed on retiring, half expecting interruption; and he went out at once with Riggers.

Mike and Humphrey had led the horses to a neighbor's barn, and the men and boys were hanging wet blankets on the side of the house nearest the stables. Percy had possessed himself of the garden hose, and was playing an ineffectual stream on the stable roof. The bull could be heard bellowing and rushing madly about the carriage-house. "The partition which divides the carriage-house from the stable is burning," said some one. "As soon as it falls he'll be out. You men and boys there had better scatter."

Riggers stood at a little distance from the carriage-house, calmly loading. "Open ze door," he said.

For an answer, there was a general rush away from the vicinity. Men climbed up the rose-trellises on to the verandas; boys shinned up the fruit-trees; even Mr. da Souza retreated. Only Percy, from very shame, seized an ax and stood by Riggers. Admiration for the boy's intrepidity, and scorn of his own cowardice had nerved him to this act.

Riggers hesitated an instant. "Where ees Jack?" he called.

"I'm here, in the coupé."

Mr. da Souza sprang forward and carried him to the house.

"Now open ze door, Percy."

"I'd rather stand by you."

"You won't. You nevaire stand by nobody, nevaire."

"Come away, come away, Percy," cried Jack; but Percy never moved.

Mr. da Souza came forward. "Stop!" he cried authoritatively. "There is no need of risking your life. Mike, bring a ladder, and he can fire through the window over the door."

Mike piled three small hencoops on top of each other, and broke in the glass. Riggers mounted on this unsteady pedestal, and took aim at the plunging beast below. It was not so heroic as to stand and shoot him as he bounded from the open doors. But Riggers had no wish to pose in a melodramatic manner; he only desired to do the deed, — that the way in which it was done was inglorious, was no matter. Even now it was no easy thing to hit him in a vital part; but Riggers was a crack shot, twice the clear reports of the repeating-rifle rang out, and then the boy scrambled down. Mike tore aside the hencoops, and, assured by Riggers that the bull was really dead, several stout fellows rolled the doors back.

Riggers handed the rifle to Mr. da Souza, saying: "You see ze bull lie still. He is dead. Zat is all I want. Now you take me to ze preeson; I am ready."

Mr. da Souza gave one apprehensive glance at the quiet mass, which was just now so full of rage and

fury. It was surely dead ; but what was that other form outlined against the burning hay, that leaped down from the loft, and, blackened and singed by smoke and flame, rushed blindly by them ? Mr. da Souza sprang for him as he passed ; but he struck out furiously, and dashed on. His blows missed Mr. da Souza ; but one of them struck Riggers on the forehead, and the boy dropped as if he had been shot. Mr. da Souza lifted him in his arms and carried him into the house, out of the way of the young men, who had now fastened their grappling-irons to the walls of the carriage-house, and were trying to pull it down in order to save the house.

As Mr. da Souza turned, he met Percy. "That man was Mr. Glitter," he said.

"I know it, but he has escaped me. If I had let Riggers lie, I might have caught him ; but he would have been trampled on by the crowd, and now there is no telling where the villain is hiding."

"Yes, there is," Percy replied. "He's at Mrs. Harrigan's ; and if you are quick, you'll get him."

"Good ! I will stop at the sheriff's on the way. We'll let some one else put out this fire. Come with me, and tell me all you know about this case."

CHAPTER X.

THE BARONESS'S LETTER. — MR. DA SOUZA'S NEW THEORY.

DURING the eventful day which had just passed, Mr. da Souza had elaborated an entirely new theory of the robbery, which had nothing whatever to do with Riggers, and which had induced Mr. Huntington's sudden departure for New York. The theory had been reached in this way. Mr. da Souza had, by a visit to the pawn-shop in the morning, corroborated his conjecture that the ticket which Mrs. Coffin had found was the one belonging to the cameos. The pawn-broker's description of the boy was vague; but he was certain that he was *not* short or dark, and that he did not speak broken English. Evidently it was not Riggers. Could it have been Percy? He determined to ask him, feeling perfectly confident that he would tell the truth. He had found Percy, as we know, on his return from Great Folly, and asked him how he came in possession of the pawn-ticket. Now was the time for heroism and for his confession. Percy felt so; but it was not easy, and he hesitated. Mr. da Souza no-

ticed his hesitation, and asked, "Did Riggers give you this ticket?"

"Oh, no," Percy replied, with an expiring effort at manliness; "Riggers had nothing to do with it."

"I am glad of that. Then where did you get it?"

Percy reflected that he had saved Riggers, and that there was no necessity of implicating himself. "I found it," he said.

"Where?"

"On the road to Great Folly."

"That's all I wanted to know," said Mr. da Souza; and Percy turned away, feeling meaner than he had ever done in his life.

Leaving Percy, Mr. da Souza called at the post-office, and possessed himself of the mail for the parsonage.

Among the letters he noticed one for Riggers from Brazil; for it had happened, quite contrary to Mr. da Souza's calculations, that the boy's letter in regard to the necklace reached his mother before Mr. da Souza's telegram, the latter having gone astray several times, and reaching the Da Silva plantation on the upper Amazons the day after the following reply had been despatched to Riggers.

The telegram, it will be remembered, falsely announced that Riggers had met with an accident, and was intended to decoy the Baron and the Baroness into the power of the law. It succeeded admirably; for the Baroness, tortured by a mother's anxiety,

insisted on proceeding at once to the United States while the Baron, who had prospered lately in business, felt not only that he could afford the journey, but had other reasons for undertaking it.

All this is better told by the Baroness's letter. The only fact which it did not relate at all bearing on the case, was the important one that the Baron and the Baroness had taken the next steamer, were following the letter, and would, if winds and tides were favorable, arrive in Little Wisdom only a few days after it. Mr. da Souza carried the letter to his own room, opened it skilfully, and was not a little surprised by its contents, which were expressed in the choicest Portuguese.

SANTA CLARA, August.

MY BELOVED SON, whom I prefer to all the cherubim, for indeed I know little of them, while you I know to be filled with all lovable qualities and all good dispositions, — It is a great heart-ache for me to be so long separated from you, and it is only because I know that you are in health and happy that I can endure the anguish. I rejoice that you are making such progress in the American language, for it is the desire of your father's heart that you should have a North American education, so that on arriving at man's estate you may have full and free choice as to whether you will be an American of the North or of the South.

What you write me in regard to the necklace is most strange. It is indeed my necklace, or was so before your father left it with Mr. Huntington as surety; and I trust ere-long that he will ransom it again, for we have had a great cacao crop, and have sold it all to a New York confectioner.

Your father has nearly paid off the mortgage upon the estate, and we are all most happy. I know not why Mr. Huntington has given out that the stones in the necklace are false, — perhaps in order not to attract thieves, who as you tell me were wise enough to see that the stones were of price, and to attempt to secure it; in which endeavor I am glad to know that they were foiled.

Say to Mrs. Huntington that I am glad that she and her husband, who were so kind to us in our time of necessity, have chanced to buy an estate in the village where my child abides. It is like them that they should be kind to you also; and my heart blesses them. It is well that you should know that the reason I parted from my necklace was that we might leave in Dr. Coffin's care a sufficient sum of money to secure your education, in case our affairs, which were then in jeopardy, should have been utterly shipwrecked. But now that fortune smiles upon us again, I would like to buy back the necklace, to be worn one day by your own wife. Say to Mrs. Huntington that if she will kindly keep it for you a little longer, I do hope soon to pay to her husband with interest the sum with which he so kindly obliged us.

Your father had hoped some day to buy the place where the Huntingtons live, in case you decided to make your home in North America, for it has many associations for him; but this you need not say to the Huntingtons or to any one. The associations are too far in the past, the possibilities too far in the future, to affect the present. Your father is glad that you like the Coffins. As for me, I was not greatly drawn to them. They seemed to me cold, not like our Southern hearts; but I bless them and every one who has been kind to my boy.

And so, praying the sweet Jesus and his loving Mother and your patron saint to keep you from all sin, danger, and grief, I am

Your loving mother,

FRANCISCA ROSARIA INEZ DA SILVA.

Mr. da Souza gave a long whistle on reading this letter. "Well," he said to himself, "either that is the most cleverly composed bit of decoy or else we are completely at fault." His investigations of the morning had resulted in a revulsion of feeling in favor of Riggers. He took the letter at once to Mr. Huntington, and read it to him.

"It sounds genuine," replied the other. "If I did not know that that woman had cleverly replaced the original necklace by an imitation one, I should be completely taken in; but she can't deceive me twice."

"How do you know that she has deceived you once?" asked Mr. da Souza.

"Easily enough. She had an opportunity to take the necklace which no one else had. It was declared genuine by experts when I first received it, and spurious after the ball at which she wore it."

"All that may be true, and yet she may not have stolen it."

"I tell you no one else had an opportunity to steal it," Mr. Huntington exclaimed testily.

"Have you considered that it is possible that no one has stolen it, — that this is the original necklace?"

Mr. Huntington gave a great start. "Impossible!"

he exclaimed. "It has been pronounced a counterfeit by an expert, — by Mr. Glitter."

"I thought so, — the man who attempted to purchase the necklace of you at a trifling price, the man who has been proved to be a swindler and a cheat, and who, finding that he could not prevail upon you to part with the gems, entered your house as a burglar and attempted to rob you."

"Are you positive of this?"

"Not quite; but follow my reasoning. I do not know where Riggers was at the time of the attempted burglary, but he certainly was not in the house during the afternoon when the wire leading to the electric bell was cut, and the watchman's rattle abstracted. He was not the one who nearly killed the dog, for Billy is fond of him. Riggers went to the barn the other day when he did not know that I was observing him, and fondled the dog, who licked his hand and showed great pleasure at seeing him. The man whom Grandmother Huntington pushed downstairs must have been hurt by his fall. I examined Riggers carefully while he was sleeping, the night after my arrival, and there was not a single black and blue spot on any portion of his body."

"You believe, then," said Mr Huntington, "that Mr. Glitter, failing in his attempt to swindle me out of the necklace, remained in this neighborhood on the night when we thought he left, and attempted to steal it?"

"Not quite so fast. I believe this *may* have been

the case. Mr. Glitter may have simply crossed the platform of the owl train to give Mike the impression that he had gone. The pawning of the cameos would seem to imply that he may still be lurking in this neighborhood. I think that he is."

"With the intention of making another try for the necklace?"

"Possibly; but we can be surer of that if you will ascertain whether I am correct in my supposition that you have really the original valuable diamonds. I would advise you to take the necklace to New York at once, and have it examined and pronounced upon by Tiffany."

"A good idea! I will go this afternoon. It would be a remarkable thing if I should find that it was genuine after all, and that the Da Silvas have been innocent all this time. It would be one of the greatest jokes I ever heard of."

"You are not to blame for having been deceived. I have been taken in also. Only think! I have lured the Da Silvas here by a telegram falsely stating that an accident has happened to their son. Just how to explain that little action I hardly know, if it should turn out that no crime has been committed, and that therefore there is no ground of suspecting them as criminals."

"In case I find that the diamonds are all right we will telegraph them that the boy is too; but I don't quite like to go to the city and leave my family unprotected, if that villain is watching in the vicinity for another opportunity to steal the necklace."

"I will sleep in the house, if you desire, while you are gone. If you can induce your mother to occupy some other room, I will take hers. Then if the burglar fancies that your absence will be favorable for his operations, I shall be on the spot to secure him."

Mr. Huntington's intended journey was made as public as possible. He left word at the post-office to have his letters forwarded to his city address for the next five days. It was with great difficulty that Mrs. Huntington induced her mother-in-law to share her own chamber during her husband's absence. The old lady was fond of her own room, and did not like to give it up to Mr. da Souza. She only consented to make the change, that her daughter-in-law might feel herself "protected." She removed her most precious belongings, her medicine-chest, her books, and the precious necklace, which Mr. Huntington finally persuaded her to allow him to lock in his safe, removing it to his pocket just before leaving.

What happened after this we already know. Mr. Glitter heard Riggers call to Percy that Mr. Huntington had just stepped on board the afternoon train, and he at once concluded that this would be a good opportunity to make another attempt to secure the necklace. He entered the Huntington grounds after dark; but seeing a light in the house, slipped into the stable, and climbing into the loft, lay down upon the hay and fell asleep. He was awakened by a crackling noise, and found that the hay behind

him over the stable was on fire. He thought that he had extinguished the cigar which he threw away ; but he was mistaken. He pushed forward into the loft over the carriage-house, intending to descend here ; but the moonlight shining in showed him the indistinct form of the bull roaming uneasily about and beginning to snuff the smoke suspiciously. He was trapped, and he shrieked aloud for help. Mike was awakened by the sound of some one crying " Fire ! " as it seemed to him from the midst of the flames. He reported this afterward, adding, —

" I 'm not sure whether it was an angel or a divil ; but one or the other it must have been, barrin' it was n't the bull hissel. An' sure it was enough to make a brute baste spake to hear the flames a-cracklin' overhead, ready to make briled beefsteaks of him before his very eyes, without so much as askin' would he prefer to be rare or well done, with inions or tomatty sauce."

When Jack had aroused the inmates of the parsonage, we know that he had found Riggers dressed and ready ; but Percy too was not asleep. He had lain awake all night in greater mental distress than Riggers ; he saw his own wrong-doing in all its enormity ; step by step he reviewed his downward course, and he called himself, unmercifully, a thief, a liar, a coward, a traitor, a sneak.

" I cannot stand it," he muttered to himself. " I cannot blot out the fact that I have been a thief and a liar ; but I will not be a traitor and a sneak, no, not

to keep my first wrong-doing covered up. I don't care who knows it, I don't care what happens, I will tell." He rose and leaned his head on the window-sill to cool it. There was a lurid haze over in the east, but through it Mars was shining, as red as blood, but distinct; and he thought of the poem which Mrs. Courtney had recited, —

"O star of strength, I see thee stand
And smile upon my pain;
Thou beckonest with thy mailèd hand,
And I am strong again."

He sank upon his knees, and prayed for strength to face the ordeal before him; and the strength came. He wondered whether Mr. da Souza had returned for he longed feverishly to have it over. He dressed himself silently, stole down the stairs, and peeped into Mr. da Souza's room; it was vacant, and the bed untouched. He thought he heard his mother stir as he passed her door. "Poor little mother!" he said to himself; "that's the worst of it, she has got to know what a scoundrel I am." He thought of telling Riggers of his new decision, but said to himself that Riggers would not believe him, — he had vacillated too much, had promised great things, and had basely retracted his promise. He would not disturb Riggers with any more protestations, he would wait until he could *do* something. Then he stole back to his bed, and lay down, thinking, thinking, until Jack called him to the fire.

And now he was telling Mr. da Souza the whole miserable story as they hurried together after the sheriff.

Mr. da Souza was silent when Percy had finished.

"You did n't think I could be so bad, did you?" Percy asked.

"No, I did n't; but by the way you talk I infer you have done with that sort of thing. I should think you'd tried it enough to find out that it does not pay. I shall respect what you have told me; you need not fear that I shall betray your confidence. I needed just this information to clear Riggers and to secure Glitter, but no one shall know how I obtained it."

"Oh, yes, they shall," Percy replied. "I am going to tell it all to father and mother when I get home; and you can tell the entire Huntington family. I don't care who knows. They can't despise me any more than I despise myself."

Mr. da Souza whistled; he had never met just such a boy. "Better take a night or two to think that over," he said.

"I have, and I don't want any more such nights," Percy replied firmly.

The sheriff and a deputy accompanied them to Mrs. Harrigan's. When they reached the house, it was broad daylight, and though early for a call, the smoke curling from the kitchen chimney proved that Mrs. Harrigan was getting breakfast.

"We will approach the house from the rear," said



PERCY'S MEETING WITH MR. GLITTER.

the constable and deputy, "and prevent his escape by the back door."

"Do you go up to the front door alone," said Mr. da Souza to Percy, "and tell Mrs. Harrigan that you want to speak with her boarder about the cameos. I will follow you as soon as she lets you in."

Percy did as directed. His heart beat quickly as Mrs. Harrigan opened the door and gruffly asked his business. "There's a gentleman that boards here wanted me to bring him some cameos he lost," Percy replied.

"Wait till I see," Mrs. Harrigan replied; and she closed the door. Percy waved Mr. da Souza back, for he had just entered the gate; and Mrs. Harrigan opened the door. She looked around searchingly, and then called, "He's alone," to some one in the kitchen.

"Let him come in then," said a voice which Percy recognized; and Mrs. Harrigan showed him in. Mr. Glitter was eating his breakfast; and Percy trembled as he took up a great carving-knife and sharpened it before cutting up his ham. Percy trembled still more violently as he heard Mrs. Harrigan bolting the front door, and realized that Mr. da Souza could not get in.

"Have you brought the cameos?" asked Mr. Glitter.

"They're outside," Percy stammered.

"Why did n't you bring them in?"

"I wanted to see what you were going to give me," Percy replied, gaining courage.

"I'm going to give you the worst beating you ever had in your life, if you don't hand them to me this minute."

"Let me out then," Percy exclaimed, really frightened as he backed toward the door.

"Shall I open the door?" asked Mrs. Harrigan.

"I suppose so, if he really left the cameos outside."

"They really are," Percy exclaimed. "I did not bring them in, I truly did not."

Mrs. Harrigan drew the bolt and opened the door. But Percy did not go out; instead of that, Mr. da Souza stepped in, saying coolly, —

"I arrest you, Mr. Glitter."

Mr. Glitter turned and attempted to rush out of the back door, but was caught and handcuffed by the constable and his deputy.

"Where shall we take him?" asked the sheriff.

"To the station," replied Mr. da Souza. "I see that Mr. Glitter has his hand-bag packed ready for departure. He shall not be disappointed in his intended journey. Will you carry it there for me, Percy? It will be necessary for me to return to Mr. Huntington's house for a few minutes, but I will meet you, gentlemen, before the departure of the next train."

Percy trudged after the others, carrying the bag. They were all silent. On reaching the station the men went into the baggage-room and waited.

After a time the telegraph operator handed Percy a telegram.

"Can you take that to Mr. da Souza?" he asked.

Percy handed Mr. Glitter's bag to the constable, — and ran back to the Huntingtons'. He met Mr. da Souza on the veranda. He was now completely dressed, had just finished his breakfast, and was bidding good-by to Mrs. Huntington.

Percy could see that though the stable was destroyed, the fire was extinguished and the house was saved.

Mr. da Souza read the telegram. "Hurrah!" he exclaimed, "Mr. Huntington wires: 'Tiffany declares the diamonds genuine. Will return to-morrow.' My theory was correct."

CHAPTER XI.

DROPPED STITCHES.

“**A**ND now,” said Mr. da Souza, “I am off to New York with my prisoner. Percy, I advise you to go home and get your breakfast. You were wakened early, and you have been through a good deal this morning.”

Mr. da Souza did not know that Percy had not slept at all, and that he had been through far more during the night, before he was supposed to have been wakened, than since.

“Mr. da Souza, one moment. Excuse me, but have you told Riggers?”

“Told Riggers! What?”

“That it was Mr. Glitter who attempted to steal the necklace, that you don’t suspect him, and that I *did* tell.”

“Well, no; I have been so busy that I quite forgot about Riggers; but you can tell him, Percy.”

“Please, Mr. da Souza, it will only take a moment if he has n’t gone home, and I wish you would. I’m afraid he would not believe me.”

Mr. da Souza was in haste, but he stepped back into the house. Riggers had not gone home. He

lay on a couch in the library, having passed from one fainting-fit into another.

The horses had been so frightened that Mike had not been able to make them enter the grounds ; but it was just as well, Mrs. Huntington said, for Riggers was not even able to be taken home in the carriage, and she was only too glad to care for him. She had bound chopped ice on his head, had placed a hot-water bag at his feet, and had sent Humphrey for the doctor. Trix stood fanning him, while her mother held her vinaigrette to his nostrils.

“ Give him a little brandy,” said Mr. da Souza.

Riggers opened his eyes, but a look of terror came into them as he saw Mr. da Souza.

“ There, my boy,” said the detective ; “ forgive me, it was all a mistake. We know now that it was Mr. Glitter who tried to steal the necklace, and that you had nothing to do with it. Percy here has told, like the good fellow he is, that you were in bed all the time, and that he was the one who was out late that night.”

But Riggers had closed his eyes with a moan ; he had heard nothing, or if he had heard, he had not comprehended it.

“ I am afraid he is pretty badly hurt,” said Mr. da Souza. “ That’s another thing that villain Glitter has to account for. I must be off now, but I will return in a few days. I am sorry to leave you, Mrs. Huntington, with this new anxiety ; but your husband will be here before night.”

"Kindly telegraph him," replied Mrs. Huntington, "to take the earliest train and to bring our family physician with him."

"I shall need him for a few hours in the city, to make some statements in regard to Glitter."

"Then ask him to send the doctor on before him."

Mr. da Souza had gone, and Percy stood helplessly watching Riggers. It came over him that his confession had been made too late for Riggers ever to know of it, that his friend was dying.

"Isn't he going to come to himself again?" he asked anxiously. "I must make him understand what Mr. da Souza told him."

"I would n't trouble him with it now, Percy," Mrs. Huntington said kindly. "You saw it was of no use when Mr. da Souza tried. It only distressed him. Run home, and come again later in the day."

"I'll bring mother over; but, Mrs. Huntington, please let me stay, too, because what we tried to tell Riggers would take such a load off his mind, and I want to be here ready to tell him just as soon as there is a chance for him to understand it."

"We will see what the doctor says. Meantime I shall be very grateful if your mother will come."

Percy ran home quite as swiftly as he had run to the fire. His mother was standing at the gate, looking anxiously up the street for him.

"My dear boy, where have you been?" she asked. "Bricktop went home two hours ago, and said that

the fire was out. I thought at first that you and Riggers had stayed to breakfast at the Huntingtons'. But what has happened? How dreadfully you look!"

Percy could not speak, and she led him into the house.

"What ails the boy?" asked Lady Caroline. "Lie down on that lounge, while I get you a good strong cup of coffee."

Dr. Coffin passed his arm around Percy, and supported him to the lounge. He was rarely demonstrative, but he saw that the boy was spent with physical over-exertion and mental excitement.

"Take it slowly, my son," he said. "Wait a minute till you are stronger. Now, has any one been hurt? What does this mean?"

Percy rolled from the lounge upon his knees. "It means that I have disgraced you, and that I am no more worthy to be called your son."

"The land!" exclaimed Lady Caroline, coming in with the coffee and spilling it all. "Hear the child talk! He's clean crazy."

"Leave him to me, dear," pleaded Mrs. Coffin; "Percy will tell me everything."

Dr. Coffin's face grew set and stern, but he rose to leave the room. "Stay, father," Percy cried; "I will tell you all, — everything."

He told it all without excuse or explanation. His mother sat silently holding his hand, and his father walked the room without a word, but with an occasional groan, which told how this confession hurt

his pride. Even Lady Caroline was petrified into silence.

"Where is Mr. da Souza?" Dr. Coffin asked at last.

"He has gone to New York, but he is coming back in a few days. He will verify everything that I have said. I have told you everything."

There was a dead silence for a minute.

"Father, are n't you going to say *anything*?"

"I am not prepared to say anything yet, Percy. This has been a terrible blow, and I feel stunned. I don't know what to say until I have thought it over, and talked with Mr. da Souza. You may go to your room."

Percy staggered from the room, his mother going with him, and still keeping hold of his hand.

"Come back, Mary," called Dr. Coffin; "this is no time to coddle the boy."

"In a moment, dear," Mrs. Coffin replied.

"I love you, Percy," she said hurriedly, as she led him to his room, "and I thank God that he has made you see your sin and turn from it. I am happier than I have been for many days."

Percy looked at her in surprise. "That is the last thing which I expected you to say."

"Yes, my son, a mother is endowed with a sort of clairvoyance. I have known for some time that all was not right with you; and I have prayed for this, —prayed that God would give you repentance, and strength to begin a new life. I thank him that he has answered my prayer. With your father it is dif-

ferent. He had implicit confidence in you, and this has come upon him like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. He suffers, — and he suffers terribly because he loves you. Never doubt, whatever course he believes duty leads him to, that he loves you. Rest now, and pray for strength to face the consequences of your confession. Some of them may be very hard. It is not easy to clamber back to the right path after you have once left it. But oh, my boy, I am so happy that at last your face is turned in the right direction.”

Her words, so full of inexpressible tenderness, lifted a great weight from his bursting heart.

“God bless you, mother!” he said; and he allowed her to help undress him as when he was a little boy, and sank wearily into his bed.

Lady Caroline tapped at the door. She brought a bowl of hot milk. “This is better for you than the coffee,” she said. “You don’t want stimulating, only soothing. Go right down, Mary, or Solomon’ll be up here after you. He says—and I agree with him—that what Percy needs is n’t petting, but a good, sound —”

Mrs. Coffin laid her finger on her lip.

“Yes, go, mother,” Percy said. “Go to Riggers, and tell him everything.”

Mrs. Coffin hurried away; and Lady Caroline watched Percy drink his milk, with an inscrutable expression.

“How much better you are to me than I deserve, Aunt Caroline!” Percy said gratefully.

"That's so," Lady Caroline replied grimly.

"Everybody's too good to me. I thought Mr. Glitter might arrest me and send me to prison, when he knew everything; but he did n't."

"Your father won't be too good to you, for one, if it's any consolation to you to know it. You'll get your deserts from him, every time."

"Father is just, and I won't get more than I deserve."

"There may be two opinions about that; but every one'll agree as to this, -- Percy, you are a fool."

"I know it, auntie," Percy replied meekly.

"When you got into trouble, why did n't you come to me for money? You knew I had it."

"To repay money which I had taken to gamble with?"

"Well, 't would have been encouraging you in wickedness, I s'pose; but then I surmise I should have given it to you. There's more than one fool in this family."

Percy hung upon her neck, and hugged her until she cried that the milk would spoil her bombazine gown. Then she went downstairs, leaving a five-dollar bill upon the bed, and saying, "Give that to Mr. da Souza when he comes back, to get them cameras out of pawn. Like as not, Mr. Glitter stole them from some poor photographer who needs them to carry on his business."

When the physician arrived from the city, he ordered Riggers to be kept very quiet, and expressed grave doubts as to the result. "It is concussion of

the brain," he said, "and the boy was evidently in a highly overwrought nervous condition when it happened. It is a turn of the hand whether he pulls through."

He could not be moved; but Mrs. Coffin took charge of him that day, a trained nurse having been sent from New York to attend him at night.

It was a great disappointment to Percy when his mother brought back the news at night that Riggers could not be told.

"I am sure the doctor is wrong," Percy said. "I believe it would cure him to know that he is not suspected, that he is fully cleared."

Mrs. Coffin shook her head sadly. "He would not understand if I told him," she said.

Percy's heart was wrung with a great remorse. He went to the Huntingtons' the next morning, and sat in the hall outside Riggers' door, hoping to be called and told that now he might relieve his pent-up feelings; but Riggers did not come out of the semi-comatose state into which he had fallen. The physician did not regard this as a particularly discouraging symptom. "He is simply stunned," he said, "and may come out of this all right. It may be Nature's way of resting after the severe excitement to which you say he has been subjected before receiving the blow, and which has rendered the brain more susceptible to the shock. There appears to be no fracture of the skull. No operation is necessary. We have simply to wait. Our greatest dread is inflamma-

tion. If he should awaken from this condition delirious, it will be a bad symptom. He must be kept quiet at all costs."

The doctor returned to the city, leaving orders that he was to be telegraphed for if a change for the worse occurred. Mrs. Coffin explained this to Percy, and advised him to go home ; but he begged to be allowed to remain to be ready to run errands, — to do anything for his poor, wronged, and suffering friend. Many bitter thoughts and self-accusations passed through his mind as he sat there, lonely and uncomfortable. As Aunt Caroline said, dropped stitches were hard to pick up.

What was perhaps hardest to bear was the fact that Humphrey and Trix had lost their respect and admiration for him. Humphrey simply avoided him. He had not spoken a word to Percy since he understood what had happened ; but Trix had not been able to repress her indignation, and had given him "a piece of her mind," telling him plainly that if Riggers died she would consider him responsible for his death ; that she had never thought him capable of such meanness ; and that she could never see him without thinking of it, or believe in him again.

Trix was nothing if not intense ; and her words were unjust, cruel, and untrue, for in time she came to forget this blot on Percy's escutcheon, and to esteem him again. But the boy could not foresee this, and for the time he was very wretched. Only Jack clung to him. He never passed through the hall —

and he made many excuses for doing so — without running to throw his arms around Percy's neck.

At night he went home with his mother, and retired early, consumed with anxiety and remorse. His mother was right; the road back to integrity was a hard one, and some of the consequences of his sin could not be undone,—and what if Riggers should die?

Dr. and Mrs. Coffin had a long consultation together in reference to Percy that night; and in the morning Mrs. Coffin told Percy that he must remain at home, and hold himself in readiness to go to the study when his father called him.

“But you will send for me if I can speak to Riggers?” Percy asked eagerly.

“I will come if there is any change,” Mrs. Coffin replied; and Percy sat down and waited.

Dr. Coffin had been at first inclined to be very severe. It has always seemed to me that the loving forgiveness shown by the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son is expressed more frequently by mothers' hearts than by fathers'. It was late in the forenoon before Dr. Coffin could trust himself to talk to Percy on the subject, so deeply had his pride been wounded; but Mrs. Coffin's gentle influence had its effect, and at last he called his son into his study, and said with more sadness than anger: “Now, Percy, let us go to the bottom of this miserable business. I want to understand and I want you to understand just what has brought you into this trouble. One never becomes wicked all at once. Where was the first wrong step?”

"I think, sir, it was when I went with Bricktop to have my fortune told, that night after the Portrait Party. It did not seem at the time such a dreadful thing to do."

"No; but it was done without the knowledge of your mother or of myself. You knew we would have disapproved of it, and you intended to keep it concealed from us."

Percy bowed his head.

"Now, here is a very important point," continued his father. "Your views and ours may differ as to what is innocent and proper for you to do; but we are responsible for you, and while you are under age it is your duty to be guided by us to give up pleasures which may seem to you perfectly right, which may even be harmless, and in which you may indulge yourself in after life with a clear conscience. At present, your own views of what is right for you to do cannot be the test when they clash with ours. What would become of the discipline of an army if every soldier were to do what is right in his own eyes? Until your majority, I am your superior officer. Do you recognize this?"

"Yes, sir," replied Percy. "I never felt it any indignity to obey you, but I did not feel that I was doing anything very wrong."

"Very good. Then this first fault is traceable to *conceit*. You thought you knew better than we what was innocent. Trust us a little longer, my boy. Very soon the awful responsibility of deciding every

act will rest entirely with your own conscience. You thought there was no harm in having your fortune told, no harm in playing cards for money."

"I beg pardon, sir, I had no wish to play cards for money. I knew it was wrong to do so; but Jim Harrigan made me."

"Ah! Then just here conceit drops out, and a new element of evil takes its place, — *cowardice*. When you took up the cards and began to play, you were a moral and physical coward. No one can compel us to do wrong. Jim Harrigan could have robbed and killed you, but he could not have made you play, if you had not done it yourself. Look at the bank-cashiers, the express-agents, who have felt the revolver muzzle at their temples, and have refused to give up the combination or unlock their safes, and have died refusing. Those are the heroes of modern times. Have you no desire to win the admiration of right-minded people?"

"Yes, father," Percy replied passionately, "I have too much desire for admiration; that was my third and worst sin. That was what kept me from confessing at once that I had tampered with and lost the Fire Company's funds. I could not bear to have them know it, to have Humphrey and Trix despise me as they do now. That was what made me do everything that was wrong after that. That was what made me be so cruel and dishonorable to Riggers. I wanted to be admired, — that was the beginning and end of everything."

"The desire to be *worthy* of admiration is not wrong. It leads to deeds of heroism ; but you, Percy, wanted the admiration, and were content to know all the time that you were not worthy of it. It seems to me that is a very poor gratification."

"It is no gratification at all," Percy replied ; "it is punishment, it is torture."

Dr. Coffin rose and took his son's hand. "Was the realization of this what determined you to be honorable rather than to seem so?"

"Yes, father."

"I am glad to know it. I was coming to that, after tracing what faults had led you astray. I wanted also to understand what motives had brought you back. Your natural course would have been to persist in wrong-doing, to continue a hypocrite ; but you turned squarely around and informed upon yourself, and I was eager to know what motive was strong enough to make you do this, and whether there were other like influences at work, strong enough to battle with the ones which had dragged you down."

"It is simply that," Percy replied, "I like other people's admiration, but I like my own, too, and I could not live with my own soul and have it call me a sneak to all eternity ; so I suppose," and here he smiled faintly, "my change of behavior is n't very noble, after all, for it comes just from a desire of my own admiration."

"Say rather of God's approval, my boy, and I shall be perfectly satisfied. You could not be satisfied

with yourself, because you knew he could not approve of your conduct. Was not that the final, pivotal motive?"

"I suppose so," Percy replied doubtfully. He was too humble to ascribe even a lofty motive to himself.

"Then, thank God, I believe I can trust you for the future. Let us pray;" and the father poured forth a prayer of thanksgiving and of strong desire for divine guidance for this son of his, who was lost and was found.

There was no suggestion of punishment or discipline,—nothing but perfect confidence between father and son. "Father," Percy said, half hesitating, as he turned to go, "one thing which made me see how bad I was, was my desire to be worthy of you, to act as you would have done under the same circumstances. Aunt Caroline told me what you did once, — how you cleared Arthur Pride from all suspicion of murder, though in doing so you believed that you made it possible for him to come back and to win mother. I thought if my father could stand such a test as that, I ought to try to show that some of his spirit was in my soul as well as his blood in my veins."

"Aunt Caroline should not have told you that story," said Dr. Coffin. "We were both mistaken about your mother. She never loved Arthur Pride, except as an old and dear friend, and on the night that his father died she had refused Arthur's offer of marriage. He thought she did so because she feared that she would not be an acceptable daughter to the

old Colonel; and when he asked her if this was not the case, she urged this reason also upon him, and this was why she fancied, at that first terrible sight of what had happened, that he had killed his father. But she never really loved him. That great blessing was mine all the time, though I did not know it; and Arthur's love could not have been as deep as mine, for he married, though long afterward, and he says that he is happy."

"Arthur married and happy!" exclaimed a surprised voice at Dr. Coffin's elbow. It was his wife, who had flitted in during the latter part of the conversation, and who now twined one arm about Percy and rested the other on her husband's shoulder.

"Yes, Mary," Dr. Coffin replied, "Arthur was willing that you should know whenever I thought best; and it may be a help to you in understanding and nursing that poor boy."

Mrs. Coffin turned pale. "Is 'Riguez Arthur's son?" she asked.

"Do you not see the resemblance? It is strange that you have not guessed it before this. Arthur did not hear of his vindication until after his mother's death. He came back a year ago, and wrote me to meet him at Great Folly. He said he had wished for several years to see me to thank me for clearing him, but he did not wish to come back to live. He had passed through many strange adventures. He had become a favorite and finally a partner of a wealthy planter and baron on the Amazons, whose daughter

he finally married, taking their name instead of giving his own to his wife, and buying the title of baron from the government. They do not call it buying, I believe; but it amounted to that. He made certain large contributions to the government, and the title was bestowed upon him in recognition of his liberality. This rather cramped his resources for a time; but he told me that ever since his son was born it had been the desire of his heart to have him prepared for college by us; and he left certain stocks and bonds with me (the proceeds of the sale of the necklace) sufficient to complete his education. He was good enough to say certain grateful and admiring things about my action in his behalf, and his desire that like principles should be instilled into his son; but he was more anxious that his son should have a close friend for life, such as he felt our boy must be, and most of all, he wanted Riggers to have your loving, motherly care. He did not desire to meet you, or I would have brought him home with me; but I brought the boy home instead."

Mrs. Coffin wrung her hands. "And how have we fulfilled this trust?" she cried,—"with suspicion, with coldness, with torture! Oh, why did you not tell me this before? Oh, what a tragic fitness there is in things! Arthur Pride's son lies dying on the very spot where his father died on that fatal night."

Percy uttered a cry of anguish. "Dying, mother! Oh, it cannot, cannot be!"

Mrs. Coffin calmed herself with a strong effort of

will. "My dear boy," she said, "try to bear up. 'Riguez has come out of his stupor, but is half delirious. He talks incessantly, and it is impossible to calm him."

"Then I am sure he needs me," Percy cried. "If he is only out of his head half of the time, why certainly I can tell him."

"I have come for you," his mother replied, "hoping that there might be a lucid interval in which you could speak with him. We will watch for it."

They hurried back together, and found that the physician had arrived. He looked graver than upon his first visit. On hearing Percy's story, he refused to admit him. "Our patient has forgotten all those unhappy incidents," he said. "It would be almost certain death to bring them back to his memory just now. He fancies himself back in Brazil; and the only thing that troubles him is that he does not recognize his mother in the faces around him. He calls for her incessantly and most piteously. If we could satisfy that wish, I think he could rest and we might save him."

"His mother must be cabled for."

"There is not time for her to reach him. If he were only delirious enough to mistake you for his mother, we might be able to pacify him. Otherwise he will soon wear himself out."

Mrs. Coffin again entered the room. Riggers' eyes were closed, but he moaned "Muzzer, muzzer," and rolled his head wearily from side to side. Mrs. Coffin

bent over him, kissed his forehead, and called him "my son."

Riggers opened his eyes instantly, but closed them, and again shook his head in the piteous way.

"You are not my muzzer," he muttered. "My muzzer ees very beautiful. Her eyes are very luffing. She smile so sweet; her hands so pitty, so warm, so soft. Your hands thin, cold; you not luff me. She wear such pitty dresses; she wear flowers, diamonds; she have perfume like a rose, like ze lily, — what you call him, — ze Victoria Regia. She sing so sweet, — so sweet; she dance so light, — she luff to dance; but she luff me more. She leave ze dance to kiss me; she neffer hurt me, neffer; zat was ze diamonds what hurt; she hate dose diamond for zat. Oh, muzzer, muzzer, come to your 'Riguez."

Percy could hear him rave as he crouched in the hall, and his tears fell like rain upon his clasped hands. He could not endure it, and he went out upon the veranda. As he did so, he saw a lovely woman alighting from a carriage. She had dark hair and lustrous eyes; and a subtle, penetrating perfume, strange but sweet, floated from her fluttering laces. No man could look upon the Baroness Francisca Rosaria Inez da Silva without yielding her his instant admiration; and Percy was man enough for this. He comprehended too that this must be Riggers' mother, but he could not understand how she had come at his call as on the magic flying carpet of Solomon. She looked at him very earnestly, and she

too comprehended. "You are my son's so dear friend," she said. "You are weeping. He is then very ill. He is worse?"

"I will take you to him," said Percy. As he opened the library door, a wandering puff of the outer air wafted that strange, sweet odor toward Riggers. He uttered a cry of joy, and looked up into the great loving eyes above him, and was satisfied.

He slept after that deeply and sweetly; only waking at long intervals to look up and be sure that she was still there,—to take the nourishment or medicine offered by her hand, and to sleep again.

"I am fery sankful to you 'zat you send for me," the Baroness said to Mrs. Coffin.

"I am thankful that you came in time," Mrs. Coffin replied; but she could not understand it at all. Only Mr. Huntington knew why the Baroness had been summoned, and he did not choose to explain. Strange to say, the Baroness never wondered how it happened that she had been sent for before Riggers was hurt; perhaps she did not realize that this was so. Every thought was merged first in a consuming anxiety for her boy, and then in joy over his recovery.

For he did recover. Day by day he drifted slowly, surely back to health. With him, as with his mother, all other anxieties were drowned in the happiness of being together; and no memory of his sore trouble came to him until one day, as he lay seemingly asleep, he heard Mrs. Huntington talking about the necklace.

"We nearly lost it," Mrs. Huntington said; "for

Mr. Glitter, who was as accomplished as a rogue as he was as a lapidary, made us believe that your necklace had been stolen from us" (just how, Mrs. Huntington did not explain), "and one of imitation gems substituted. He did this because he hoped to buy it of us for a song."

"The Judas!" murmured the Baroness; "and to think he might have succeeded!"

"We would not sell the necklace; but we did believe that it was only paste, and we were very careless of it. Only think! the children played with it in the barn, lost it in the hay, and the cow nearly ate it up."

"Tears of ze Virgin!" exclaimed the Baroness. "Zat cow ees more greedy as Cleopatra, — for she would drink only pearls, while zis beast would eat diamonds."

"It was Mr. da Souza who found everything. Mr. Glitter made two attempts to steal the necklace, but was finally caught, and is now safe in prison."

"So," thought Riggers, "zey no longer suspect me, and Percy did not haff to tell on himself after all. Well, I am glad, for I would haff been sorry to disgrace Percy."

After that he asked to see Percy; and when the boy came, and trembling with emotion asked to be forgiven, Riggers replied, —

"Don't say one word, Percy; I know it all. It ees ol right, ol right."

But Riggers did not know it all until one day when

Trix and he were alone together, and that young lady expressed her opinion of Percy most vigorously.

"How you know Percy do all zoze sings?" Riggers asked.

"Why, he told," Trix replied.

"He tole! what make him tole? Don't you s'pose he like have you sink he nice?"

"I suppose he could not help telling when he found you were suspected. Only a sneak could keep still when his friend was in danger."

"And Percy was no sneak, don' you forget zat. He was my fren. I am proud to haf a fren like zat. Don' you say one word about my fren!" and Riggers burst into passionate tears, which he wiped away instantly, indignant that a girl had seen him cry. "Senhorita Trix," he continued, "I luff Percy, I luff him, and you must luff him too; eef you do not, zen I cannot luff you."

Trix laughed merrily. "You are a funny boy," she said, "but I like you."

Calm settled down upon Little Wisdom. The Baron da Silva did not visit the village. He was too busy, he wrote; but he sent for Riggers and Percy to make a trip to South America with his wife and himself on their return, promising to send them back as soon as Riggers was strong enough to resume his studies.

Mrs. Huntington and the Baroness were driving the day before the departure; and the Baroness spoke

once more of the necklace, and asked to be allowed to redeem it, not so much for herself, but that she might give it some day to Riggers' bride.

Mrs. Huntington begged that it might be left in their possession so long as Grandmother Huntington should live. "I think it would kill her to part with it," she said. "As soon as my husband returned from New York, she insisted on having it in her own keeping. She has made her will, and has left it to Trix; but I will explain to my daughter that when your son marries she is to give it up."

"Mebby not now, mebby not," muttered Mike, who had heard the conversation from his seat on the box; "sure there's an aisy way of settling that dilemny, I'm thinkin', though it's not the loikes o' me would be puttin' such nonsense as that in the moinds o' the childer these tin years comin'."

THE END.

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